

Inaugural Dissertation  
submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the PhD-Degree of the Faculty of  
Social Sciences and Cultural Studies of the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen

# **Aesthetics of Transgression and Its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art**

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Giessen, 2016/2017



FACHBEREICH 03 SOZIAL- UND KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN

# **Aesthetics of Transgression and Its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art**

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from  
Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Giessen, 2016/2017

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Disputation date: July 18, 2017

## ABSTRACT

### Aesthetics of Transgression and Its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art

*Aesthetics of Transgression and its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art* offers an insight into contemporary art practice and image production within post-traumatic culture and “post-socialist” condition in former Yugoslavia. A theoretical position is established through a reconsideration of the category of the aesthetic and the notion of transgression as a continuous movement in-between contradictions that characterize this borderline condition, as well as our encounter with images and among images. The research entails contextual consideration, theoretical articulation and practical curatorial engagement in the context of former Yugoslavia. Particular focus is on photographic practices at the crossing between aesthetic and documentary realm. Defined as cultural symptomatology, these practices are analyzed around the concept of the symptom as it travels across the fields of cultural psychoanalysis and critical theory, visual studies and art history, trauma theory and theory of photography.

Key words: aesthetics, critical theory, contemporary art, former Yugoslavia, photography, post-socialism, post-traumatic cultures, symptom, image theory



## ABSTRACT

### Ästhetik der Transgression und ihre Strategien in postjugoslawischer Kunst

*Ästhetik der Transgression und ihre Strategien in postjugoslawischer Kunst* bietet den Einblick in die photographische künstlerische Praxis und die Bilderproduktion im ehemaligen Jugoslawien, die durch posttraumatische Kultur und postsozialistische Situation gezeichnet sind. Die theoretische Position wird durch die Verhandlung der Kategorie des Ästhetischen und des Begriffs der Transgression bestimmt, verstanden als eine kontinuierliche Bewegung durch die Widersprüche, die diesen Grenzzustand charakterisieren und auch unser Verhältnis zu den Bildern und zueinander bedingen. Das Forschungsvorhaben schließt kontextuelle und theoretische Untersuchung mit ein, sowie die kuratorische Praxis im Kontext des ehemaligen Jugoslawiens. Der Fokus liegt dabei auf der photographischen Praxis an der Schnittstelle des Ästhetischen und des Dokumentarischen. Diese Praxis ist definiert als kulturelle Symptomatologie, deren Analyse um das Konzept des Symptoms entwickelt wird, das durch Felder der Kulturpsychologie und der Kritischen Theorie, Bildwissenschaft und Kunstgeschichte, Traumatheorien und Theorie der Fotografie wandert.

Schlüsselworte: Ästhetik, Kritische Theorie, zeitgenössische Kunst, ehemaliges Jugoslawien, Photographie, post-Sozialismus, posttraumatische Kultur, Symptom, Bildwissenschaft

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Prof. Dr. Carl-Peter Buschkühle who continuously encouraged me to navigate through this complex research that I embarked upon with great enthusiasm. I am also grateful to the members of the committee: Prof. Dr. Claudia Hattendorff, Prof. Dr. Bojana Kunst and Prof. Dr. Gerald Siegmund, for their extremely useful comments and inspiring inputs.

I would especially like to express my gratitude to GCSC (International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture) and DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst). It is guidance and tremendous amount of knowledge that I gained as a participant within the GCSC doctoral program, enabled through a two-year DAAD scholarship, that has proven to be invaluable resource for my research.

This dissertation would not be possible without participation in regional curatorial research projects across former Yugoslavia. I am grateful to all the artists, researchers and curators from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, with whom I had the wonderful opportunity to collaborate during my work as a curator at the City Gallery “Collegium artisticum” Sarajevo. Special thanks for their advice and help with editing, proof-reading and translation to my dear friends Pau Artigas, Borjana Gaković, María José González, Stephen Hefford, Taida Jašarević, Tjaša Kancler, Igor Santrač.

Finally, my greatest gratitude goes to my parents for their unfaltering belief and support.

# INTRODUCTION

Basic idea underlying this research is to address the dynamics of aesthetics and transgression, that has troubled art theory and practice throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to reconsider its function within the ambivalence-laden context of former Yugoslavia at the end of the century. The research is focused upon photography-based practices that captured the process of Yugoslav disintegration and post-traumatic cultural landscape in the aftermath of the wars of Yugoslav succession (1991-1995). The thesis pursued concerns the role of these practices that goes beyond simply documenting the visible changes in cultural, political and socio-economic landscape. These practices envelop at the crossing between aesthetic and documentary realm. Such crossing is one of the key issues in contemporary art theory, starting with a question: “what is the relationship between encounters with artworks or images and our encounters with one another?” (Costello and Willsdon 14).

The investigation of post-Yugoslav case is set against the background of the unresolved contradictions of “post-socialist” condition.<sup>1</sup> Against this background, the notion of transgression surely does not indicate a supposed elimination of borders in the world that celebrated the end of the Cold War: after the year 1989, borders actually multiplied in the European periphery, including former Yugoslavia as a borderland

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<sup>1</sup> “After the disappearance of the state socialist regimes [...] most dramatically across the former Yugoslavia, a period of violence, conflict and general instability and economic misery has been followed by a seemingly endless transition to liberal democracy and neoliberal economy. During this process some countries have joined the EU, further marginalizing the ‘latecomers’ and ‘laggards’ in the long process of ‘European integration’ (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania), all of which are now encircled by the EU border” (Štik and Horvat 13). On post-socialism and related notions, see also *Glossary of Common Knowledge* Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <<http://glossary.mg-lj.si/referential-fields/geo-politics/postsocialism>>.

between East and West. The notion of transgression in my research refers neither to the elimination of borders nor to the border-crossing, but to a specific kind of movement that characterizes borderline condition: a constant movement in-between contradictions, and a refusal to settle for a simplified reconciliatory solution, whether through the identity-infering narrative or the narrative of democratic normalization.<sup>2</sup> The notion of transgression in my research thus refers to the register of *border-thinking* as a theoretical stance. Theoretician Madina Tlostanova has explained such stance in following words:

When you are the border, when the border cuts through you, when you do not cross borders in order to find yourself on either side, you do not discuss borders from some zero point positionality, but instead *you dwell in the border*, you do not really have much choice but to be a border thinker.<sup>3</sup>

As this condition of dwelling in the border is thoroughly *sensed and shared*—the border is not something out there, but “cuts through you”—the category of the aesthetic is reconsidered as a “sub-cognitive sensibility and affective passage to making sense of the world” (Pollock, *Visual* 16). Following Griselda Pollock, the reconsideration of the category of the aesthetic in relation to the notion of transgression belongs to a theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> In his text “East!” philosopher and sociologist Rastko Močnik defines the ideology of post-socialism as the identity-infering narrative, normalized through the narrative of democratic transition: “It is only an indicator of the much deeper trouble our epoch has with historical or, put more brutally, with political thinking” (344).

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Tjaša Kancler for bringing my attention to this reference. According to Tlostanova, this is a condition of the post-socialist subject with regard to a broader issue of coloniality and its operations of classification and construction of difference. It calls for a border epistemology in reference to Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of Borderland. Web. 1. Nov. 2016. <<http://www.kronotop.org/folders/post-soviet-imaginary-and-global-coloniality-a-gendered-perspective-madina-tlostanova/>>. The notion of transgression, following Michel Foucault, refers to a mode of being and thinking as an interminable spiral movement of questioning and refusal of certainties: “to proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where the limit defines being” (Foucault 35-36).



landscape that seeks “to understand and to acknowledge the catastrophes that render our age post-traumatic,” “to confront and to process the weight of the historical real as traumatic,” and specifically through aesthetic practices, to discern modes for “transforming the traumatic weight that will haunt our cultures unless it is . . . ‘worked through’” (Pollock, “Aesthetic” 830-836). She has warned, however, that the emergence of trauma studies in the arts and humanities has also been accompanied by the misuse of the concept of trauma at the risk of creating a “trauma industry” (*Visual* 8). The danger in this misuse of the concept of trauma as a cultural as well as a clinical concept lies in its application as “a mode of pacifying or even effacing the reality of the conflict and violence” (8). In the Introduction to the edited volume titled *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis. Art and the Image in Post-Traumatic Cultures*, Pollock has argued for the politics of representation grounded in the encounter between psychoanalytic and aesthetic theories: “We need, therefore, politically to situate the engagement with psychoanalysis and notably with the concept of trauma associated with what lies beyond graspable knowledge but may be accessed through the processes of aesthetics” (13).

A thesis on *Aesthetics of Transgression and Its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art* draws from such an encounter as one of the main macro-platforms of contemporary theory as “theoretical practice.”<sup>4</sup> It is a way to confront conflicting social and political imagination in the circumstances of social and cultural collapse. Such an approach does not focus upon the relation between the artwork and the psychic life of its author, nor does it consider an artwork to be an illustration of psychic phenomena. The focus is upon

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<sup>4</sup> Theoretician Ana Vujanović has defined theoretical practice “as a self-reflective social-apprehensive practice . . . [with the aim] to intervene into structuration of the [art]world, producing its conceptual frameworks, and furthermore to locate the artworld on the social map, by facing it with broader issues of art, culture, and society” (284-285).

the concept of the symptom as a point of resistance to the totalization of meaning, referring to the incapacity or the refusal of the subject to ‘totalize’ itself into a homogenous being, and thus opening up towards a new borderline-type subjectivity as a form of resistance against the dominant modes of identification within “post-socialist” condition.

Theoretical psychoanalysis holds that subjectivity in its expanded understanding is neither individual nor personalized, so that its task goes beyond normative adaptive therapies for malfunctioning individuals. The formation of subjectivity is never achieved. This is its political stake, and the encounter between critical theory and theoretical psychoanalysis is based upon the principle that society-induced wounding should not be pathologized at the individual level (and thus fragmented and depoliticized): “Pathologizing as individual suffering what needs to be grasped as a collective wounding from political violence displaces the political causation and response” (Pollock, *Visual* 8). Instead, the paradox of psychoanalysis should be “reconfigured so that we might understand both the political value of psychoanalysis and the psychic dimensions of the political, and in both cases the political and the psychic are linked to the mediation of the image, or representation in general” (xvi).

This investigation has its local and international genealogies that address the changing concept of art in the age of culture, taking into consideration the construction of cultural identities and the negotiation between them. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a radical shift in the consideration of cultural identities, as well as the conditions of production and display of art, and distribution of knowledge about it. Instead of accommodating art practices from the periphery into the master narrative of universalizing narrative of Western art, the strategies have developed to accentuate on local and regional contexts.

As opposed to the vertical model of the ‘universal’ (or West-centric) art history, the influential Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski has proposed a move towards horizontal art history, a polyphonic and dynamic model of critical art-historical analysis. The critical approach that has pushed the general abstract idea of culture toward consideration of contextual specificities, has been accompanied by an insight that “context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events” (Culler xiv). Deriving from this insight, Piotrowski, among others, has opted for the notion of context to be supplanted by the notion of “framing” in approaching the topic of cultural transformation. Instead of assuming that the encountered local context can be presented in a neutral frame, the notion of framing points to the interpretive strategies that activate particular context in the first place.

Cultural symptomatology has particularly important role in this process, whereby the process of framing turns into an aesthetic strategy of transgression pointing to the surplus that escapes the effects of totality. Within contradictory post-socialist condition, “practices concerned with the production of the effect of totality tend to concentrate in the sphere of culture” (Močnik, “East!” 345). Rastko Močnik has argued that “when innovation has been banned from the systemic establishment, art, in its very practices, has curiously and irrepressibly affirmed itself as a zone of risk and experiment—that is, of politics and historicity” (344). As art practices became increasingly involved with the investigation of socio-cultural mechanisms of creation, exchange and consumption of values and meanings, they also generated a critical thinking about the changing concept of art, related to the dynamics East/West, center/margins, personal/public, self/other, proximities /distances, memory/oblivion. In his text “The Post-Yugoslavian Condition of

Institutional Critique: An Introduction On Critique as Countercultural Translation,” Boris Buden has stated that “far from not being able to catch up with the West—as the liberal critique claims—we are actually not able to catch up with our own past, as far as it concerns an experience that has been common to both sides of the West/East divide” (Buden 31). Art practice as cultural symptomatology investigates this dynamic on the level of fragmentary circumstances (city, home, body, environment), “at the scale of intimacy, of skin, of shared heartbeats and feelings, the scale that goes from families and lovers to people together on the street corner” (Holmes n.pag).

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the symptoms of contradictory condition have emerged through the surface of artworks, offering signposts for unearthing the ways in which a revolutionary dream keeps haunting the transitional present, opening new ways of imagining, producing new forms of subjectivity and releasing new forms of connectivity. Precisely after the break-down, new form of non-integrated subjectivity emerged from war-time experience and recognized itself in the revolutionary dream of former Yugoslavia, in the face of the politics of hatred and post-socialist oblivion (Chapter One). Photographers across Yugoslavia captured this recognition as the historical moment of “awakening” in terms of Walter Benjamin (Chapter Two). Deriving from the aesthetic promise of photography (Chapter Three) and attending to the non-integrated symptoms that persist in post-socialist landscapes (Chapter Four), the aesthetic strategies of transgression do not merely contest the dominant ethno-nationalist or neo-liberal narratives but help to open up our present for future rewriting.

## ***QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE***

The real ashes of Sarajevo represent the symbolic cremation of a previously common realm of art, common to several generations who had thought it quite normal to live and work in an atmosphere of continuous contacts, exchanges, differences. On the ruins of those fruitful processes, at least in the field of the arts, some new periodic tables for this part of the world were formulated in the early nineties, established on the basis of the new state communities and their cultural circles. (Denegri, “The Strategies” 410-411).

The present work is structured in four chapters, related to four main research questions. Chapter One addresses the specificities of cultural and political situation in former Yugoslavia since the mid-1980s when the transformation of cultural landscape started to take place. The question is how these circumstances relate to the change from universalizing to contextualizing tendencies in the processes of production and display of art, and distribution of knowledge about it? This has also been accompanied by the new readiness to explore visual art in its vital urgent function, which is addressed in Chapter Two, following the critical legacy of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, to pave the way toward revitalization of perception and non-reconciliatory thinking in images. What is important to emphasize is that an image never stands isolated, it is always a product of a sensible encounter among various actors, and it always implies certain interpretive strategies of framing that bring certain context into being. Chapter Three explores these issues through problematization of photographic culture throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter Four focuses upon the photographic tendencies across former Yugoslavia, which belong to the general tendency of contemporary photography to

“attend to the aftermath because photography is, in relative terms, at the aftermath of culture. What we see first ‘live’ or at least in real time on television might be revisited by photographers depicting the stillness of traces” (Campany *Photography* 44). This is a tendency of “producing images more akin to monuments than moments,” in order to differentiate from the hybrid mass of mainstream visual culture: “Many of the defining photographic projects of the last decade or so have been depictions of aftermaths” (44).

The first part of Chapter One is dedicated to the role of exhibition as a medium through which the cultural meanings of East/West division have been reestablished and administered. It reminds of some of the most important projects dealing with the contested issues of history, identity and difference in the new geopolitical arrangement: from the movement *Neue Slovenische Kunst* (1984) to the realization of their project *East Art Map* (2003)<sup>5</sup>; from the first three issues of *Manifesta* European Biennial of Contemporary Art at the turn of the centuries (1996-2000) to the wave of the exhibitions dedicated to the post-1989 art practices and to the transnational research, education, publishing and exhibition projects.<sup>6</sup>

The second part of Chapter One is dedicated to the critique of post-socialist ethno-nationalism and production of national identity as an integrative illusion and the effect of

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<sup>5</sup> My main point of reference is Marina Gržinić’s analysis: “The East Art Map is important, as it offers a way of perceiving the (new) avant-garde movement not simply as the space of (disturbing) Otherness, but as the Other space. With this project we can perhaps think about Aesthetics in a new productive form, namely, *Easthetics*” (Gržinić “On the Repoliticisation” 49).

<sup>6</sup> As Marko Stamenković has pointed out: “The most important aspect of these exhibitions is that they have brought into focus and made visible the art and cultural productions of other worlds. . . [However], this gets close to the issues of genetics in the way of questioning relationships between those selective principles and the phenomenon of cloning and selective breeding. . . in terms of inclusion/exclusion as results of art power mechanisms functioning in accordance with contemporary geopolitical changes” (Stamenković 96-97).

totality. The critical photographic series are characterized by the interrelation between personal and collective memory. An important aspect addressed in the first chapter is the issue of critical memory of the common socialist past. The symptom-based approach insists on the irregularities within memory politics aiming to reshape collective identities through reshaping collective memories.

The last part of Chapter One is dedicated to the artistic and cultural resistance in the mid 1990s in the face of raging nationalist policies that overtook the important institutions and media. The particular focus is on the case of Sarajevo and a group of photographers who were active in the field of documentary and journalist photography, and parallel to this activity they developed, in the midst of destruction, an aesthetically informed photographic documentation of the everyday war reality.

Chapter Two tends to explain further the visual aesthetic of transgression with regard to the urgency for considering anew a dialectics of seeing and experiencing in contemporary world, characterized by the explosion of visual media and the ever-increasing *anaestheticization* of perception. The issue here is not of shocking images, but of images that are able to *symptomize* the visible world, that is, to articulate something that remains hidden, invisible, traumatic. These are images that, in Didi-Huberman's parlance, can "touch the real" and "look back at us" because they confront us with something unapproachable and unresolvable within ourselves.

Chapter Three focuses upon the aesthetic promise of photography in relation to the problematics of the image as a medium, as a document and as a symptom. The artists working in the wake of representational critique, the works based in semiotic and psychoanalytic theoretical premises, already in the 1970s but especially in the 1990s, postconceptual and archive-based documentary practices, have pursued a critique of

information and authenticity. The issues related to social reality necessitate constant contextualization of the photographic document and the complex articulation based upon the combination of text and image. This critical approach to photographic practice was characterized by an “anti-aesthetic” attitude that has been reexamined in recent years with regard to the reconsideration of the role of the aesthetic within the work of visual culture. If we understand that the aesthetic plane is a plane of sensible encounter between the image and the viewer and that political space is inter-subjective, the following conclusion by Ariella Azoulay in her text “Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political” is in place:

[t]he photograph preserves traces of other people’s gaze and action, and thus becomes a kind of singular point in which these are stored and might be linked one to the next and moved anew at any point in time, in unforeseen directions . . . The photograph by itself is not political but the space among people, where it takes place, can potentially become political (Azoulay, “Getting Rid” 253).

What is at stake in this potentiality is, as theoretician and artist Marina Gržinić has insisted, the building of the political subjectivity and the question of “how we resituate our artistic and curatorial positions within a certain social, economic and political territory” (“Social” 7).

Upon this background, Chapter Four gives an overview of the specific topics that characterized the aftermath of disintegration of former Yugoslavia, based primarily upon the results of a curatorial research on the tendencies in post-Yugoslav photography under



the title *Aftermath. Changing Cultural Landscape*.<sup>7</sup> The case study starts with the photographic investigation of the coal miners' strike in 1987, which represented the initial popular uprising related to the general democratic turn, later hegemonized by the nationalist projects that preceded the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The main aspect of the photographic projects is a relation between the photographer and his subjects, during more than two decades. We are reminded of the utopian project of the role of photography in the creation of a new revolutionary subject. However, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this utopian project has been burdened by a traumatic weight. The subjects in post-Yugoslav photographers do not represent the rising of a new revolutionary consciousness, but rather embody the surplus population and the models for a borderline-type non-integrated subjectivity.

The second part of Chapter Four is dedicated to the group of artists who reinterpreted the new topography in post-socialist condition. There is a reference to the European new topography rethinking the photographic document related to the post-industrial landscape. Influenced by Berndt and Hilla Becher, but from a significantly different perspective, post-Yugoslav artists dedicated themselves to the broader issue of industrial decay and its heritage, as well as the decay of local economy and ruthless commercialization of public space in contemporary capital-ridden world.

The third part of Chapter Four is dedicated to the photographic projects dealing with the landscapes of trauma and the scenes of crimes committed during the wars in

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<sup>7</sup> The project *Aftermath* was initiated in 2011 by the Photon Center for Contemporary Photography Ljubljana in cooperation with Pordenone Arte Contemporanea and cultural institutions across former Yugoslavia. Through exhibitions, lectures, presentations, screenings and panel discussions it offered confronting opinions and experiences of number of experts with interdisciplinary background (Sluga et al.). See Chapter Four.

former Yugoslavia. The main issue is that of (un)representability: how can a photographic image make us apprehend what we are looking at? We can look at the image of a beautiful forest landscape, the city square or a long road disappearing into the distance, and not know what kind of memories these idyllic or gloomy scenes may hide. The photographed landscape is not a representation of the event (the event itself is absent) nor it is simply an illustration of a historical description.

The fourth part addresses the series of photo-diaries and photo-portraits created by photographers who belong to a generation designated as post-traumatic youth—dealing with the issues of identity and ambiguities in the sense of belonging. They are working with the fragmentary and unstable nature of the archive in order to reflect upon the unresolved and unstable existence within post-war reality.

### ***CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGICAL TRAJECTORIES***

Methodological trajectories of this research belong to the interdisciplinary practice of cultural analysis as “theoretically informed, critically situated, ethically oriented to ‘cultural memory in the present’” (Bal, *The Practice* 1). This research has benefited from the input received during my participation in the International Graduate Centre for the Studies of Culture at the Justus-Liebig University of Giessen. The Centre fosters research beyond disciplinary boundaries that necessitate theoretical innovation of terms, bringing together different spheres of knowledge in a concept-based methodology driven by the series of cultural turns that opened up new ways of identifying questions rather than drawing new conclusions.

Based in the idea of ‘travelling concepts’ from the work of Mieke Bal, my research follows the trajectory of the concept of *symptom* across the fields of critical theory, art

history, aesthetics, visual studies, and theoretical psychoanalysis. The symptoms are “frontier stations”—as defined by Sigmund Freud in his text “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety” (1926)—they appear when there is an irresolvable clash between two forces. The symptoms thus have “dialectical” character. However, it is a “strange dialectics,” according to French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, because a proliferation of possible conflicting meanings cannot lead to a synthesis. In this way, the symptom, following Didi-Huberman’s reworking of Freud’s and Lacan’s theories in his theory of images, function as a vehicle of transgression as a capacity of the “symptomization of the visible world . . . of a regime wherein we think we know what we are seeing” (Didi-Huberman, *Confronting* 28). Taking off from Freud’s explication that the process of symptom formation is always twofold, only one side of it being visible, Didi-Huberman has insisted on the difference between the visible and the visual: “With the visible, we are of course in the realm of what manifests itself. The visual, by contrast, would designate that irregular net of event-symptoms that reaches the visible” and which “signifying ‘material’ is first of all the image” (31). In this regard, Didi-Huberman shares the same commitment as Walter Benjamin to the unconscious of the visible. Finding the proximity, from the epistemic point of view, of art history to psychoanalysis, he applies the psychoanalytic theory of the symptom to the realm of images, proposing a visual aesthetics of transgression that takes into account “all the condition of meaning operative in an image” (180).

Moreover, the image is always in the plural, in relation to other images, bodies, spaces and media. Visual aesthetics of transgression concerns the way we encounter and are being encountered by the images whose ability is to simultaneously create and disrupt the order of understanding. This methodology serves to apprehend the world through images, taking the images from the level of object to the level of the analytic

category and media of understanding (Bachman-Medick 349). Since the 1960s, and, in particular since the 1990s, there was a significant change within these debates regarding art practices and new media, in the relation between aesthetic experience, artistic thinking and new media (Buschkühle), between image theory, art history and art education (Hattendorff), as well as regarding the status of exhibition-value and curatorial research (O'Neill and Wilson).

Furthermore, the renewed interest in the critical potential of the aesthetic as a category “opens up an entire realm of questions that had been closed during much of the second half of the 20th century, when it seemed almost impossible to conceive of aesthetics in terms of anything but the opposition between modernism and postmodernism” (Halsall, Jansen and O'Connor 10). In the introduction to the volume *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, it is stated that to insist on an ‘anti-aesthetic’ attitude of critical postmodernism can end up in “unwittingly confirming formalist modernism’s error while mistakenly believing it has overcome it” (Avanessian and Skrebovski 3). Photography in particular has been a key point of discussion within critical postmodernism in eclipsing the notion of the aesthetic through the consideration of photography as cultural phenomenon, and not in terms of its inherent nature as a medium. In recent times, there was a reassessment of the role of aesthetics within cultural analysis, whereby a theory of image and visual studies are coupled with a philosophy of history and discourse on memory.<sup>8</sup> Such reassessment “aims to demonstrate that the study of photography—its singular images, its discourse, its socio-

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<sup>8</sup> The period of radical transformation of global cultural landscape since the end of the 1980s and a “crisis of history” has brought about the proliferation of the discourse on memory as multidirectional and palimpsestic (Huyssen; Radstone and Hodgkin), and memory studies as interdisciplinary project (Ansgar and Erll) in relation to the issues of cultural identity, particularly the dependency of cultural memory on media technologies and the circulation of media products.

political affiliations—is a laboratory for how and why history and theory complicate one another. Another name for this complication is aesthetics” (Emerling 6).

The final station in the trajectory of the concept of the symptom, which brings it back to the setting of psychoanalysis is the encounter between trauma theory and theory of photography. This encounter provides a way of bridging the political significance of psychoanalysis with the visual aesthetic of transgression, understood as a shared affective passage in-between contradictions, a transmission of social and intimate experiences that cannot easily be integrated into ready-made contexts, as well as trauma by definition falls outside of our cognitive and representational systems. The affinity between photography and trauma lies in the way they “both mark crises not of truth but of reference . . . Each photograph, by virtue of the medium, inevitably turns the viewer into a latecomer at the depicted site” (Baer 181). This belatedness that characterizes both trauma and the medium of photography calls for an understanding of a future that is still radically undecided.

#### *AFTERMATH AND POTENTIALITY*

From Sarajevo war reality to the aftermath of disintegration of Yugoslavia, the photography-based practices addressed in this dissertation share an awareness of their own inevitable involvement in the process of framing reality within which they proceed to strategically disrupt dominant models and points of references. This awareness is three-fold: the awareness of the medium in the process of production, the awareness of the relation between the image and the viewer in the process of reception, and the awareness of one’s own positioning in the process of distribution of meaning in contemporary global cultural landscape, in which “paradoxically the ‘other’ cannot even

gain its visibility and (not even political) recognizability if not displayed as a spectacular commodity” (Kunst, “On Strategies”). Thus, these practices employ and take advantage of framing strategies in order to point to the realm that exceeds its logic. In reference to Judith Butler, this is not to claim that they function in “some free zone of its own making. Exceeding is not escaping, and the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound . . . between the already-there and the yet-to-come” (*The Psychic* 17-18).

The processes of identification in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century and the hostility of small differences that inform the political imagination of nationalism were incorporated into the context of global capitalism’s Eurocentric mechanism of exclusion and cultural hierarchization. This is why it would be important to reconsider, as Griselda Pollock proposed, the “political value of psychoanalysis and the psychic dimensions of the political” (*Visual* xvi). Psychoanalysis is a theory of subjectivity, not identity, because identity always leaves something in excess and creates powerful illusions that can serve as a legitimization for the annihilation of the other. On the other hand, what is negated is the fragility within one’s own identity and the power that lies within such fragility as an opening to an-other:

We suffer from identities, to paraphrase Freud’s notion that hysterics suffer from reminiscences . . . Seeing, not seeing, fearing what we see, failing to see, form one axis of the visual politics of art and the image in post-traumatic times. The other axis is offered in an expanded and not homogenous field of psychoanalytical investigations into subjectivity, its formations, its anxieties, and the sources of both violence or indifference towards the other and compassion and response-ability for an-other who is never outside the shared human compass. (Pollock, *Visual* 20-22).

Drawing from these theoretical axes, the case of post-Yugoslav art practice has been defined as a case of cultural symptomatology. In defining art practice as cultural symptomatology, what matters is not only a strategic self-contextualization with regard to the new global landscape, but also a border-thinking as a theoretical stance with regard to the unresolved contradictions of the present and critical memory of the past that, following Walter Benjamin, necessarily involves disclosing from the past those crushed potentials for the future in the constellation of danger of the present. “A certain failure, an impossibility of actualization, is then an intrinsic part of potentiality. . . the present, not the past, is relativized and remains open for future rewriting” (Kunst, “On Potentiality” n.pag.).

Not unlike the psychoanalytic process, the photographic series considered in this dissertation took several years, even decades, and many are still in process, and their results are never stable, they are questioned over and over again with each new juxtaposition and in each new exhibition. The changed relation to time and the integration of failure is what makes such practice subversive with regard to the contemporary media pace in the capital-ridden world, the “violence of constant actualization” and its “production of the modes of life.” Philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato has defined the aesthetic field as the battlefield of today because the production of the modes of life depends upon the shaping of human sensory capacity, and consequently the experience of the world that is based on it, “the expression and effectuation of the world and the subjectivities included in there, that is, the creation of the sensible” (188). Is it possible to discern in the work of visual culture and border thinking across former Yugoslavia another way of effectuation of the world beyond the politics of hatred and culture of oblivion that characterizes the “post-socialist” condition? The hope invested

into the thesis on *Aesthetics of Transgression and Its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art* is to make a miniature contribution to that enormous task.



# CHAPTER ONE

## “POST-SOCIALIST” CONDITION AND ART PRACTICE AS CULTURAL SYMPTOMATOLOGY

### *1.1 FRAMING “POST-SOCIALISM”*

This chapter refers to the procedure of cultural framing of Eastern Europe, and the strategies of self-contextualization in former Yugoslavia in the last decades of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The procedure of cultural framing of Eastern Europe is important to have in mind when it comes to the contradictions of the “post-socialist” condition, particularly related to the contested issues of cultural identity and cultural difference. As Igor Zabel, Slovenian curator, art historian and critic, has pointed out:

In thinking about cultural difference, and also about European cultural identity, we have to avoid two main traps in particular. The first is considering western (or European) cultural identity as homogeneous and universal, and the second is to think about cultural essence as something unchangeable, firm, basic, and essentially separated from other cultural essences with a dividing line that can never really be overcome. (Zabel 120).

This warning against the traps of homogenization on the one side, and cultural essentialism on the other, relates to the question whether the East/West divide has not become an obsolete topic in the “post-socialist” condition after the end of the Cold War and the changes in the global landscape. The way that Igor Zabel has formulated the question in his essay “Haven’t We Had Enough? [of Eastern Europe]” was a calling for a

heterogeneous and changeable configuration that would be able to take the contradictions into account:

Haven't we had enough of Eastern Europe? Yes and no. Yes, if we mean the political and cultural divisions and strategies of marginalization, ethnicization, exclusion, and (controlled) inclusion. But one cannot resolve such divisions by pretending that they do not exist and that they are simply an external circumstance . . . It is only through repetition, through returning to and reworking the trauma, that it can perhaps be slowly resolved, and not by repressing, ignoring, and forgetting it. No, if we mean a re-evaluation of the social and cultural potentials of Eastern Europe and their ability to transform themselves and thereby transform European identity. (Zabel 120-121).

Zabel has observed in his earlier text titled "We and the Others," first published in 1998 for a special issue of the *Moscow Art Magazine*, that the strong evocation of European identity after the end of the Cold War was a symptom indicating "the fact that this very identity cannot be taken for granted anymore" (35). The issue of cultural difference and cultural diversity has become, paradoxically, a way to secure the contours of western identity. Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski has also confirmed in his book *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*: "In effect, it is the West that is interested in maintaining the tension between itself and the East or between the Self (the West) and the others (the former East), since this tension allows it to identify its own position and to construct its own identity" (56). If the dominant position in the earlier periods has been achieved through the promotion of the universal value of western culture, it is in the times of cultural diversity since the 1990s that this dominant position is being reaffirmed through the definition of the "other." The otherness is being internalized, Igor Zabel has written, so that "we in advance understand ourselves as being 'others' for the

West, that ‘we’ look at ourselves through ‘the other’s eyes’ so to speak. This is, of course, a phantasmatic view; but through it, we understand ourselves as the Other’s other” (33).

The critical reconsideration of the East/West divide aims at challenging the established position of the West, which had supposedly remained a fixed cultural and political entity after the end of the Cold War, while the former East has lost its ideological otherness, but without, however, becoming identical with the West.<sup>9</sup> This critical reconsideration belongs to the legacy of curatorial and art-historical practice in former Yugoslavia aiming “to introduce the debate about the potential of culture to be that agency of socio-political change that could ultimately lead towards blurring, if not the geopolitical East/West border, then of the cultural hierarchies” (Milevska 183).

This issue implies taking into account the interplay between specific circumstances and more general international framework. Wendy Brown has explained in her book *Regulating Aversion. Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* that the presupposition of strong cultural essences tends to obscure the issues of social antagonisms within the celebratory narrative of multiculturalism and tolerance. Zdenka Badovinac, director of Moderna Galerija Ljubljana, has discussed this interplay in her essays under the titles of “Contemporaneity as Points of Connection” and “The Invisible East.” Instead of taking the international context to be a “mosaic of differences,” “a multitude of identities [that] are set in harmonic relationships from which all elements of tension have disappeared”

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<sup>9</sup> “Is the West still seen in the same monolithic political economical and social category as it was in the period of the Cold War? . . . what are the new divisions in a “post-ideological” Europe . . . What new tensions and frictions between East and West have come to fore now that there is no longer a bipolar world order and no more communist regimes?” Zoran Erić has asked this question in his text “Is there a new basis for a Dialogue between East and West,” included in the volume *Continuing Dialogues. A Tribute to Igor Zabel*.

(Badovinac, “The Invisible East” 68), it is necessary to consider contemporaneity as points of connection that are based on relationships filled with tension and conflict. Particularly relevant for the understanding of these relationships is the work of Slovenian artist and theoretician Marina Gržinić who has dedicated her artistic and theoretical endeavors since the mid-1980s until the present moment to exploring “the logic of global capitalism, the changes it brought to territory, the understanding of hegemony, democracy, and zoning, shifting, ideology, and underdevelopment,” all the nuances of the question of knowledge, capital, and power in relation to the processes implemented in Southeastern Europe (Gržinić, “Southeastern” 51).

The procedure of framing Eastern Europe, and the post-Yugoslav case within it, has thus been twofold. On the one side, the construction of Eastern European cultural identity has served as a point of differentiation with regard to the West, and on the other side, it has triggered the strategies of self-contextualization in the East as a production of critical knowledge and practices against the dominant narratives that tend to obscure the social antagonism and contradictions of both socialist and “post-socialist” conditions.

In the case of former Yugoslavia, the critical perspective on these issues has been premised on the meeting between theoretical psychoanalysis and critical theory. In Slovenia in particular, psychoanalysis as critical theory entered the public discourse in the 1970s through the work of the authors related to the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, known as the influential Ljubljana Lacanian School.<sup>10</sup> The Ljubljana

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<sup>10</sup> The work of Ljubljana Lacanian school (Mladen Dolar, Rastko Močnik, Renata Salecl, Alenka Zupančič, Slavoj Žižek) was based upon political and philosophical reading of Lacan’s understanding of fantasmatic core of ideology. In his 1989 book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Slavoj Žižek introduced his theory on ideology as a split domain, divided between its explicit manifestation and its hidden uncanny enjoyment that precisely relies on ironical distance by those who subjugates in order to remain efficient. See later in the chapter more on the authors from Ljubljana Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis.

Lacanian School was interested in the mechanisms of ideology, and the characteristics of radical democratic struggles in Eastern European societies previous to the end of the Cold War. The intellectuals associated with the Lacanian school have actively supported democratic changes in Slovenia before the disintegration of Yugoslavia and criticized the rise of fascist nationalism, with the journal *Problemi* as a channel for spreading their ideas to the public. The journal *Problemi* also published the first manifesto of the movement Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK) in 1985, stating that “politics is the highest and all-embracing art, and we, who create contemporary Slovenian art, consider ourselves to be politicians” (qtd. in Erjavec, “Introduction” 10).

The field of art has played an important part in the process of self-contextualization of Eastern Europe. A telling early case was that of Slovenian group IRWIN and the artists related to Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK) since the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> As numerous authors, among them Igor Zabel, Zdenka Badovinac, Marina Gržinić, Aleš Erjavec, and the authors related to the Ljubljana Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, have shown: Neue Slovenische Kunst has addressed in a radical manner the political and ideological foundations on which the East/West divide was based, as well as the social and political situation in former Yugoslavia, particularly the relationship between history, culture, and

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<sup>11</sup> “In early 1980s, Slovenian culture represented a crucial part, but still only a segment, of the broader culture of Yugoslavia, with its bands, visual artists, and writers frequently visiting, exhibiting, and performing in the large urban centers such as Belgrade, Zagreb, Rijeka, and Sarajevo. At the center of this culture stood a multifaceted association of artists that combined music, performance art, graphic arts, theater, and design: the punk and rock group Laibach, the group of graphic artists that came to be known as Irwin, the Theater of the Sisters of Scipio Nasica and the Red Pilot Cosmokinetic Theater, and the New Collectivism design group, all of which came together under the banner of Neue Slovenische Kunst—New Slovenian Art” (Erjavec, “Neue” 143).

national identity: “NSK condensed a very precise and traumatic way of dealing with history and reality” (Gržinić, *Re-politicizing* 207).<sup>12</sup>

There is extensive research done about different aspects of the activities of the IRWIN group and Neue Slovenische Kunst, and what is important to emphasize in the context of my research is that through their strategies, they framed in a specific way the “post-socialist” condition. These strategies are important for the understanding of art practice as cultural symptomatology and the status of art within society. Igor Zabel has summarized: they wanted to achieve “the tension between the political and artistic meaning. In a kind of circular motion, they both demonstrate the political function of art and purify this art of such function, returning it to art” (Zabel 96).

The thesis pursued by the above mentioned authors was that the changes in former Yugoslavia had already begun at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, “well before the fall of the Berlin wall—through the formation of an underground scene in the 1980s, and the struggle for civil society” (Gržinić, *Re-politicizing* 201). In the second half of the 1980s, Neue Slovenische Kunst as part of this underground scene brought to the surface

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<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, the process of building Slovenian nation-state was transposed into a creation of an imaginary state: *NSK State in Time* with its passports, stamps, and embassies. The founding of the NSK State in Time coincided with the beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. “The NSK Guard by the Slovenian fine arts group Irwin is a project that consists of more than a dozen photographs in which ‘local’ and real soldiers guard the flag of the imaginary NSK State in Time . . . With such juxtapositions there is a diffracted picture of reality between art and the army. Irwin does not ask us to merely choose between two or more options within a set of coordinates (art vs. army) but to change the set of coordinates altogether” (Gržinić, *Re-politicizing* 207-210). On the question of the shift from nation state to war state, with racism as central category, see also Gržinić's contribution “The Emergence of the Political Subject” to the conference *Emancipation of Resistance* in Skopje in 2013: <<https://emancipationofresistance.wordpress.com/grzinic/>>.

the contradiction between the official discourse of the late socialist regime and the everyday experience of social reality. The aim of socialist self-management in former Yugoslavia was to allow for decision-making at the lowest possible level and to make social relations and decisions direct and transparent.<sup>13</sup> However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the gap between the official political discourse of self-management and everyday life became increasingly visible. The NSK artists reacted to this situation, not by ironizing it but by scandalous bringing its hidden mechanism to the surface through the strategy of “over-identification.”<sup>14</sup> By the beginning of the 1990s, their second step was to critically address their position with regard to the local and international circumstances. In the face of the official Slovenian emphatically pro-European and anti-Yugoslav attitude, they decidedly accepted and insisted on their new position of being identified as Eastern European artists.<sup>15</sup> In his essay “The Institutionalization of Friendship,” Victor Misiano, one of the main collaborators on the international level, explained their position:

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<sup>13</sup> “Self-management socialism in Yugoslavia, especially after the implementation of the 1974 constitution, was an attempt to build a socialism that resurrected the principles at the historical roots of the contemporary workers’ movement, those of the Paris Commune. The aim of the Yugoslav legislators was therefore to establish mechanisms that would prevent the bureaucratization of socialism that thought to be inherent to the Soviet system” (Erjavec, “Introduction” 51).

<sup>14</sup> “The extraordinary critical-ideological impact of NSK, especially of Laibach group . . . frustrates the system precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it—by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency” (Žižek, “Why” 286-287). There lies the difference between postmodernist practice of ironic criticism and post-socialist practice of over-identification: according to Slavoj Žižek, postmodernist practice of ironic criticism is already inherent in the working of the ideology itself.

<sup>15</sup> The Project NSK Embassy Moscow in 1992 consisted in a series of events that resulted in a document called “The Moscow Declaration,” in which Slovenian and Russian artists acknowledged their common experience as Eastern European artists, and defined their strategies.

The members of IRWIN are trying to look at the West not as a solid body, but as something fragmented . . . [to] raise the issue of East and West—of social, ethnic and political borders—in conversations with those of both Eastern and Western consciousness . . . The IRWIN group's sharp reflection of the issue of Eastern identity is paradoxically created by the fact that Slovenia has never been as isolated from the West as the rest of Eastern Europe, much less isolated than Russia. Yugoslavia never considered itself as the absolute Other. It was different from both the West and the East. (Misiano 189-90).

The position of Yugoslavia during the Cold War was significantly different from the position of the countries belonging to the Soviet Bloc. Due to its particular political position after its 1948 break with Stalinism, Yugoslavia was generally more open to western influences in culture and economy. In the aftermath of the Cold War, Yugoslavia lost its strategic in-between position. In spite of all the differences with the countries of the Soviet Bloc, it was eventually understood as a “post-socialist” Eastern European country. The activities of Neue Slovenische Kunst were direct reaction to this new situation.

Not only did they challenge the presuppositions of the East/West divide, they also challenged the presuppositions of the distinctions between modernism and socialist realism, between modernity and totalitarianism, consideration of which expands beyond the scope of this text.<sup>16</sup> The group IRWIN also initiated the project *East Art Map*, as a

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<sup>16</sup> Critical approaches to the avant-garde tradition, putting the focus on the ambivalences of this tradition, have introduced the notions of “postutopismus” and “retroavantgarde.” Russian Postutopismus refers to Moscow conceptualism of the 1970s and 1980s (Ilya Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, Komar und Melamid, Vladimir Sorokin, Sasa Solokov, Dmitrij Prigov). The term “Retroavantgarde” coined by Peter Weibel can also be traced back to 1983: it was introduced by the Laibach group in their exhibition *Monumentalna Retroavangarda* (Galerija ŠKUC, Ljubljana, 1983). These processes were closely connected to conceptual



retrospective mapping of Eastern European Art since the 1920s. The first part of the *East Art Map* was realized in 2001 in collaboration with *New Moment* magazine and published in 2003.<sup>17</sup> This mapping has served not only to account for numerous practices that were left for decades outside of the field of vision of Western history, but also to compensate for a lack of institutional framework and critical discourse around the practices of Eastern European avant-garde and neo-avant-garde within East itself. The mapping represented also an important strategic move against the western canon of modern art, which continues to marginalize or subsume the artists under a constructed universalism. Instead of universalizing tendencies, this mapping has served to make sense of the geographical ambiguities of Eastern Europe as applied to art production: “by disentangling the different histories, languages and cultures of this region while at the same time putting them in dialogue among themselves”.<sup>18</sup>

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and post-conceptual art production of 1970s Yugoslavia. Marina Gržinić has contextualized this movement early on in her presentation “Mapping Post-Socialism,” presented in 1996 at the international conference on *Politics and Aesthetics* in Ljubljana. The Retro-Avant-garde movement included: Zagreb (Mladen Stilinović), Belgrade (Malevich) and Ljubljana (Irwin, Laibach, NSK), and Sarajevo (Braco Dimitrijević).

<sup>17</sup> Since 2004, a map of these activities is accessible online (interactive website, research, cooperation with universities, exhibition, publication). Web. 1 November 2016. <[www.eastartmap.org](http://www.eastartmap.org)>. In 2005, Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum in Haagen hosted the exhibition *East Art Museum: An Exhibition of the East Art Map – A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art*.

<sup>18</sup> This was a statement of the Symposium that took place in Leipzig in October 2005, organized by Institute of Theater Studies of the University of Leipzig, in the framework of *Relations*, a project initiated by the German Federal Cultural Foundation. Web. 1 November 2016. <[http://www.projekt-relations.de/de/explore/eam\\_uni/index.php?>](http://www.projekt-relations.de/de/explore/eam_uni/index.php?>)>. See the volume *Mind the Map! History is not given, A critical anthology based on the Symposium* edited by Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian.

## 1.2 *BORDERLINE CONDITION AND THE CONCEPT OF THE SYMPTOM*

After the end of the Cold War, the ideological difference between the East and the West has been reconceptualized as the cultural difference. The cultural Other has been defined by contradictory parameters of (national, ethnic) identification and regional homogenization (Eastern Europe, the Balkans). At the same time, the universalizing tendencies inherent in global capitalism tend to obscure the ambiguities of these redefinitions. The art-world has become the arena where these processes have been demonstrated. In this regard, it is useful to consider the variations between the first, the second and the third issues of *Manifesta* European Biennial of Contemporary Art at the turn of the century.<sup>19</sup> The first issue of *Manifesta* included the IRWIN's project *Transnacionala* (Čufer) that referred to the physical and cultural journey carried out as a conceptual art project by a group of Slovenian and Russian artists in 1996 with the aim of reintroducing the East to the West after the fall of Communism.

The second issue of *Manifesta* in Luxembourg in 1998 published a catalogue with the text "Art after Communism" by Robert Fleck. Fleck's thesis on the "new international style" in young contemporary art has argued for the "disappearance of the fundamental aesthetic differences between the various parts of Europe" (qtd. in Zabel 101). This was the same year when Igor Zabel published his critical text "We and the

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<sup>19</sup> On the first decade of *Manifesta* see: Vanderlinden and Filipovic. Critic Miško Šuvaković has considered *Manifesta* to be an advocate of cultural difference, of "a transparent relation of arbitrary registers or: as a relation or indexing and mapping of possibilities presenting the local (particular, specific, incomparable) culture to discursive machines and media capacities of mass culture of late Capitalism. With its mechanisms of disclosure and presentation, late Capitalism is inscribed into a seemingly non-conflictual situation of advocating cultural differences and gaps (of different cultures) of Europe at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." (Šuvaković, "The Ideology") Web. 1. Oct. 2016.  
<<http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/>>.

Others” for the special issue of the *Moscow Art Magazine* devoted to the problematic character of a dialogue between East and West. Zabel’s later writings elaborated on this thesis, particularly the essay titled “Intimacy and Society: Post-Communist or Eastern Art,” with which he contributed to the 2005 international project *Zurück aus der Zukunft. Osteuropäische Kulturen im Zeitalter des Postkommunismus*, led by the influential Russian philosopher and theoretician Boris Groys. In this essay Zabel concluded: “From the outset, an eastern artist is in a position that is different from that of a western artist. Regardless of the fact that they both refer to similar sources, an eastern artist is still caught in the system of preconceptions and representations” (108). An eastern artist is also inclined to insist on his/her Eastern identity as a way to enter into the western art-world, what Zabel has named controlled or conditional inclusion. The critical approach consists in a thorough study of borders, border crossing and the implication of this crossing.

The following, third issue of *Manifesta* took place in Ljubljana in 2000, coordinated by Igor Zabel, under the title *Borderline Syndrome. Energies of Defence* that obviously differed radically from the thesis on the return to “normality.” Curated by Maria Hlavajova, Kathrin Rhomberg, Francesco Bonami and Ole Bouman, the exhibition concept focused on the contradictions within the celebratory rhetoric of an expanded Europe, the escalation of reactionary politics, border controls, ethnic conflict, economic inequalities, and the reworking of these issues through artistic practices (Hlavajova 18-20; Rohmberg 21-25). An international symposium took place during the exhibition, attempting to enlighten the topic from the point of view of contemporary art theory, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

Elaborated in Otto Kenberg’s 1975 clinical study of *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*, borderline refers to the transition periods with identity

diffusion, whereby the subject is unable to totalize itself into a homogenous being. While primary narcissism is a psychic requirement, as the instinct of self-preservation theorized by Freud in his essay “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914), pathological narcissism shows up where the capacities to relate to others are weakened or have collapsed. Freud’s essay on narcissism has been followed by his study of the uncanny as a resurgence of self-as-other (1919), concluded simultaneously with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), introducing the main aspects of his modified theory of the unconscious: Ego as already pathological and Superego as threatening irrational order. Jacques Lacan has reinterpreted Freud’s theory of narcissism as an imaginary construction of the self through the “mirror stage” (Lacan, *Écrits* 89-97). In Jean Laplanche’s interpretations, this is a function of the formation of the ego in response to the demand of the Other that must be contained in order for something called an “I” to emerge in its separateness. Primary narcissism is thus a response to the extreme vulnerability in exposure to externality. For Julia Kristeva, narcissistic crisis is a sign of a broken relation between self and world, and modern Narcissus is a suffering subjectivity in need of a defense “against social and symbolic collapse” (Beardsworth 235). Julia Kristeva’s theory of narcissism was grounded in the potentiality of the articulation of subjective dynamics discovered as pre-Oedipal level of psychoanalysis after “the failure of modern institutions and discourses to accompany the subject to its borders, at the limits of society” (Beardsworth 56).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Beardsworth clarifies: “This is not only a matter of how we are to understand, or assess, the value of the symbolic, paternal function but the ways in which the ‘lost past’ of the archaic mother, an impossible past as she says, is recovered *within* the symbolic order in the shape of imaginary constructs that do not repeat the infantile form of primary narcissism, but *reform* it” (70). Kristeva’s distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic has been criticized for leaving the symbolic “both theoretically unaltered and, in the final instance, untransformable” (237). However, her contribution was enormous in considering psychoanalysis

Borderline theory provided also a framework for elaborating a critique of “post-socialist” condition through a psychoanalytic perspective on the breakdown of social cohesion, norms and values. The catalogue of *Manifesta 3 Borderline Syndrome* includes Slavoj Žižek’s text titled “Pathological narcissus as a socially mandatory form of subjectivity,” originally published as a preface to the Croatian edition of the book *The Culture of Narcissism* by Christopher Lasch (1986).<sup>21</sup> In this essay, Žižek has considered borderline to be a contemporary form of hysteria, “the point of hysterization of pathological Narcissus” as the prevalent libidinal constitution of late capitalist society (250). The argument is that hysterical question—namely, the paradox of desire—“spoils the game” for late capitalist libidinal constitution:

In simple terms, “pathological Narcissus” is so saturated with “answers without questions,” and is shown in so many ways what he “really wants,” that he simply cannot experience the paradox of the desire, the cleft between desire and wanting, which results in the fact that, despite the object of desire, “we do not know what we want.” Borderline marks the very point where this crazy curve breaks and the subject becomes hysterical, convincing himself that, despite all the answers, he in fact does not know what he wants, finally opening up to the desire. (Žižek, “Pathological” 252-253).

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to be a critical attitude, “prepared to allow silence and to admit of that which remains enigmatic, on the edges of the limits of language” (Pollock, *Visual Politics* 10).

<sup>21</sup> Drawing from Otto Kenberg’s work, Christopher Lasch has explored secondary narcissism as a cultural symptom in correspondence to the transition to “post-industrial” society. Žižek has insisted on determining this formation precisely in the moment of transformation of the bureaucratic capitalist society of the 1940s and 1950s into a developed capitalist society described as “permissive.”

The argument of this text has been elaborated in Žižek's book *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology*. He has explained that this is an order that does not prohibit but demands pleasure:

And this paradoxical reversal is the proper topic of psychoanalysis:

psychoanalysis deals not with the severe authoritarian father who forbids you to enjoy, but with the obscene father who enjoins you to enjoy and thus renders you impotent and frigid much more effectively . . . The answer is to emphasize another mode of reflexivity at the very core of the Freudian subject . . . There are numerous variations on this reflexivity in psychoanalysis: in hysteria, the impossibility of satisfying desire is reflexively inverted into the desire for nonsatisfaction, the desire to maintain desire itself unsatisfied. (Žižek, *The Ticklish* 345)

The paradox of desire is the basic paradox problematized in the field of theoretical psychoanalysis. In hysteria, as Žižek concluded, the impossibility of satisfying desire is reflexively inverted into the desire for nonsatisfaction. The hysterical subject is constantly questioning, and this makes its discourse the most important amongst Jacques Lacan's four discourses—the hysteric's discourse with its ethical and epistemological repercussions—as discussed by Bruce Fink: “The hysteric maintains the primacy of subjective division, the contradiction between conscious and unconscious, and thus the conflictual, or self-contradictory nature of desire itself . . . Hysteria provides a unique configuration with respect to knowledge” (35). Not only that the hysterical subject is constantly questioning, the discourse on hysteria amounts to a set of opposing and even contradictory statements. Wajeman has explained this point:

Hysteria has remained a riddle. Even today medical writings, when referring to hysteria, bestow on it an air of mystery. This is not simply because hysteria has remained unexplained . . . We'll give the name of hysteric to this object which cannot be mastered by knowledge . . . Knowledge *about* the hysteric is the knowledge *of* the hysteric. Freud closed the discourse of the hysteric, or rather, opened it up, by establishing as irremediable the disjunction between subject and object. The invention of psychoanalysis proceeded from his position on the hysteric: he kept silent and let the symptom speak. (77-89).

The symptom is “like a grain of sand around which an oyster forms its pearl,” Freud has described in his “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905). From the very beginnings of his theory of the unconscious, the symptom has been understood in its twofold structure consisting of the fixation of the drive and the psychic mechanism of defense against the drive. Traditionally, analysis has been focused on the second level, the level of repression (the mechanism of “healthy” Ego), but it is the drive-component of the symptom that constitutes the symptom’s resistance to the analytic treatment. This is why the overcoming of repression does not lead to the final results of “normalization”: “There are nearly always residual phenomena,” Freud concluded in *The Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937).<sup>22</sup>

Originating from the psychoanalytic discourse, a travelling concept of the symptom steps beyond the clinical framework and becomes a concept in critical theory,

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22 The case of Dora is a telling example, not because this treatment failed but because it points to the interminability as the condition of therapy. Dora was not the only case in which the original symptoms had eventually returned in their original form, but it is a particularly striking case because her hysterical symptoms revealed not only a therapy power-dynamic but also a potential of resistance within the symptom, in Dora’s case-against male-dominated society. See: Rose 128-148.

as well as in art practice defined as cultural symptomology. The history of psychoanalysis, from Sigmund Freud's theory through different streams of its revision to the feminist and decolonial critiques, is a complex history that expands beyond the scope of this text. Within the Frankfurt psychoanalytic institute, founded in 1929, psychoanalysis moved into a direction of social theory, although it was differently articulated among the members of the Institute. What is important in this direction is that it does not tend to transform psychoanalysis into a "kind of social help" (Adorno, "Zum Verhältnis" 42-85) but to problematize the naturalized ahistorical conception of psychic phenomena. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, psychoanalysis as critical theory is not oriented toward social therapy. By the same token, the theory of art practice as cultural symptomatology is not a theory of art as a resolution of cultural conflicts. Rather, in line with the psychoanalytic concept of symptom, it entails already a conflictual dialectic without resolution, and it concerns an open-ended process.

The development of psychoanalysis as contemporary cultural theory that understands the function of art as cultural symptomatology owes much to the reworking of Jacques Lacan's concept of the symptom. Instead of pathologization at the individual level, he insisted that there is no subject without the symptom, as the symptom is an inevitable aspect of the subject's formation.<sup>23</sup> In *Seminar VII: Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan has used a metaphor of making pottery around a hollow space to describe the process by which the subject is constituted. In the *Seminar XI: Four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis*, the theory of subject constitution is further elaborated. In this phase, the analysis consists in accepting the symptom as inevitable parts of subject's

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<sup>23</sup> See online Journal *The Symptom*. Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <<http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom.htm>>.



formation in relation to the imaginary identification and the demands of the symbolic order that establish the frame of the subject's fundamental fantasy: "but because what is at stake is nothing other than this very frame, it ends up 'outside' the fantasy, in another field: that of drive" (Zupančič 245), a dimension that opens up to the subject when he reaches and then traverses "the limit within which, like desire, he is bound," as Lacan concludes *Seminar XI* (276). In the following phase, the symbolic order itself is revealed as having in its kernel a traumatic element which cannot be integrated and around which the fantasies weave. The final moment of analysis is thus defined as traversing the fantasy—identifying with the symptom, which is not to say that the subject accepts its destiny as something inevitable. The gesture of traversing the fantasy enables the radical re-articulation of the symbolic order—when its phantasmatic core is disturbed. The realization of the hollow center in the symbolic order itself is the process of "jumping through the zero-point" to the thoroughly new symbolic configuration of being. The crucial element of this phase is the shift of the accent from the Symbolic to the Real. The paradox of the Real is that, although it does not exist (i.e. it is impossible), it has a series of properties that can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects: this is because it is something that persists only as failed and missed, just as a traumatic event is a point of failure of symbolization, and it can be apprehended only in its aftermath.

Slovenian philosopher Alenka Zupančič has offered an elaborate exposition of the relation to the Real in her book *Ethics of the Real*, which is fundamental to the understanding of the language of psychoanalysis as applied to Eastern Europe and the Balkans. According to Alenka Zupančič, there is an ethical dimension in this consideration of the gesture of traversing the fantasy and disturbing the phantasmatic core of the symbolic order: "The term ethics is often taken to refer to a set of norms which restrict or 'bridle' desire—which aim to keep our conduct free of all excess. Yet

this understanding of ethics fails to acknowledge that ethics is by nature excessive” (Zupančič 4). “An ethics of the Real is not an ethics orientated towards the Real,” she wrote, it is rather “an attempt to rethink ethics by recognizing and acknowledging the dimension of the Real (in the Lacanian sense of the term) as it is already operative in ethics . . . The subject cannot choose herself as a divided subject without having first experienced her own radical pathology” (32). Thus dealing with the processes of identification within the internal/external Balkans can open up the possibility for the ethical act:

The ethical act begins with finding the transcendental point of the split with the subject’s/nation’s pathology of identification. In the act, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not); the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse of the subject. The act is therefore always a ‘crime’, a ‘transgression’ – of the limits of the symbolic community to which I belong . . .

The fact is that not only do we know that . . . the Other does not exist, He knows it too . . . the ghosts of ancient authorities and ideals that haunt us . . . In this situation one should ask, rather, whether it is not possible to formulate an ethics which could face up to this reality ‘from the inside’. (Zupančič 255-256).

After the end of the Cold War, the psychoanalytic approach proved an important reference in the problematization of the construction of Eastern European cultural identity. In resonance with Jacques Lacan’s concept of the “zero-point of identification,” Eastern Europe and the Balkans have been defined as Europe’s “surplus” and, simultaneously, as “insufficient” Europe,” as its “excremental remainder” (Gržinić *Re-politicizing* 51). In her book *Re-politicizing Art, Theory, Representation, and New Media Technology*, Marina Gržinić has explained that this is “actually the first condition required for Eastern Europe to take upon itself all the characteristics of a modern

subjectivity. It is now from this inherently excremental position that Eastern Europe can arise or can be perceived finally as a subject” (51). Gržinić has given the name “Eastern European Monster Matrix” to this production of the effects of the real in the symbolic reality:

As Peter Lamborn Wilson, alias Hakim Bey, stated in his lecture at the Nettime meeting in Ljubljana in 1997, entitled ‘Beauty and the East,’ the Second World has been deleted/made obsolete, and what is left are the First and Third Worlds. Instead of the Second World, Bey argued, there is a big hole from which one jumps into the Third. I will name this hole “the Matrix of Monsters,” not as a parody, but a travesty, of the general title of Nettime conference (already a play on the fairy tale title Beauty and the Beast). (45).

Eastern European Monster Matrix has the status of the not-all and the structure of fiction precisely because it is part of the order of the Real. So it is not surprising that theoreticians have spoken of Eastern Europe as a generator of concepts in the field of art and culture that are connected with the traumatic real (66).

In the circumstances of social and cultural collapse, the aesthetic strategies of transgression are based in an expanded understanding of subjectivity, born after the jumping through the zero point of identification, defined by Zupančič as the ethical act. At this point, it would be useful to address the dynamic between subjectivity and power, transgression and ethical possibility, considering two lines of questions elaborated by Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler in dialogue with Lacan and Foucault respectively. They share the commitment to the political significance of psychoanalysis as critical theory but they differ in the conception of the subject and the use of the notion of transgression.

Žižek has developed a twofold critique of the idea of transgression as codified and non-codified. The first relates to the performative reconfigurations of the norm that “ultimately support what they intend to subvert, since the very field of such ‘transgressions’ is already taken into account, even engendered, by the hegemonic form” (*The Ticklish* 264). The second relates to the “inherent transgression” that is the strongest force of the law itself, although not publicly or explicitly manifested. What unifies a group is not the law’s acknowledged premises but participation in secrete transgressions supported by the law. In a straight-forward juxtaposition, Bosnian-Herzegovinian artist Gordana Andjelic-Galic addresses such inherent transgressions in her photo-prints titled “On Globalisation” and “In Transition”. The lessons to learn from this is that the law itself has its own obscene supplement, relying on transgression and taking advantage of the vulnerability of the narcissistic subject. Since it is only operative if it is not explicit, this supplement must remain outside of the symbolic identification: “Our sense of reality is always sustained by a minimum of disidentification” (Žižek, *The Ticklish* 267). The greatest catastrophe for the regime would be if its own ideology were to be taken in without any proper distance. Here Žižek sees the opportunity for resistance. A true ethical stance, he argues paraphrasing Lacan, fulfils itself in the traumatic endorsement of the explosive, strictly non-discursive kernel of ideology. The aim of the critique of ideology is exactly that of encouraging to enjoy the symptom, i.e. to identify oneself with the repressed core of the ideological predicament.

For Judith Butler also the question of social and political transgression is located in the instability and ambiguity of pre-subjective aspects of psychic formation. The crucial problem is that the working of power is always-already supported by the unconscious “passionate attachment” to subjection. Passionate attachment is a way to persist as oneself, “it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be” (21). Through

passionate attachment subject is thus formed and simultaneously already subjected. The psychoanalytic notion of “primary attachment to subjection” has a parallel Althusserian notion of interpellation through which “power that at first appears as external . . . assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity” (Butler, *The Psychic* 3). It cannot be accomplished without a certain readiness or anticipatory desire that might “be read as the compelled consequence of a narcissistic attachment to one's continuing existence” (113).

In this regard, she finds a ‘suppressed psychoanalysis’ in Foucault's theory and moves toward “psychoanalytic criticism of Foucault” based in the repudiation of “some romanticized notions of the unconscious defined as a necessary resistance . . . [T]his criticism will entail the reemergence of a Foucaultian perspective *within* psychoanalysis” (87):

If, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are (2).

What emerges is not the unshackled will or ‘beyond’ to power, but another direction for what is most formative in passion, a formative power which is at once the condition of its violence against itself, its status as a necessary fiction, and the site of its enabling possibilities. (65).

We can recall also George Bataille’s notion of transgression referring to the act that does not deny taboo/prohibition but surpasses it, it is a movement without resolution. How, then, to open the possibility for subjectivity beyond the “fatalism of subordination” or

“naïve forms of political optimism”? Judith Butler, in dialogue with Michel Foucault, and Slavoj Žižek, in dialogue with Jacques Lacan, have offered two different, but complementary, perspectives on the issue. According to Žižek, if fully endorsed, attachment eventually turns into dis-attachment, producing a rift in the seemingly unbreakable consistency of ideological formations from which the radical re-articulation of the very ideological framework suddenly appears possible.

In her text “Giving Account of Oneself,” Butler has asked if a new sense of ethics can emerge from this predicament that the subject is formed through subjection and she has found the opening in the fact that this process takes place in partial opacity to oneself. “Although some would say that to be a split subject, or a subject whose access to itself is opaque and not self-grounding, is precisely not to have the grounds for agency,” she has concluded:

If the identity we say we are cannot possibly capture us, and marks immediately an excess an opacity that fall outside the terms of identity . . . then this version of recognition would be one that is based less on knowledge than on an apprehension of its limits. In a sense, the ethical stance consists in asking the question, “Who are you?,” and continuing to ask the question without any expectation of a full or final answer. This Other to whom I pose this question will not be captured by any answer that might arrive to satisfy the question. So if there is, in the question, a desire for recognition, this will be a desire which is under an obligation to keep itself alive as desire, and not to resolve itself through satisfaction. (Butler, “Giving” 28).

Following these considerations, it has been argued from a critical psychoanalytic perspective that there is a transgressive-ethical aspect within the borderline-type

subjectivity emerging within the “post-socialist” condition. Constantly questioning, unable to totalize itself, a borderline-type subjectivity recognizes “the point of hysterization of pathological Narcissus as the prevalent libidinal constitution of late capitalist society” (Žižek 250), as well as “the split with the subject’s/nation’s pathology of identification” (Zupančič 255), opening up the question of the subject without any expectation of a full or final answer.

### ***1.3 DEMOCRATIC TURN, IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES, AND ARTISTIC POSITIONING***

It is necessary to draw attention to the symptoms of this condition in its historical specificity. Borderline theory was a response to the economic, political, social, and cultural transformation of European space in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century accompanied by the re-articulation of the dynamic center/periphery through the categorization normality/pathology and liberalism/barbarism. The new forms of domination have been promoted as a process of “normalization” of the former socialist countries. In order to be able to enter the world of advanced capitalism and democracy, the former socialist countries were supposed first to go through the process of “normalization” according to a series of criteria, following the neoliberal guidelines: to have stable democratic institutions that would guarantee the respect of human rights; to have a viable market economy that could compete on an equal footing with other European countries; to have a capacity to answer adequately to the obligations dictated by the social and cultural policy of the European Union. The following phase was a process of integration of some Eastern European countries within the European Union.

However, by the end of the 1990s, two parameters have remained: “while inequality is increasing, their developmental chances are decreasing,” as Slovenian

philosopher Rastko Močnik has observed in his text “Social Change and the Balkans.”<sup>24</sup> These unfortunate effects have been referred to as “the costs of transition,” as if this would suggest that they would be compensated at some point in the future. Since then, however, we have only witnessed the increase of poverty and injustice, the decline in the standard of living, the degradation of the value system, and the continuous faltering of social consciousness.

The other main regulatory measure was the maintaining of peace and security by the specialized agencies of the United Nations and NATO Stabilization Forces. The stabilization measures were considered particularly necessary in the unstable territory of the Balkans with its local varieties of Orientalism. The process of fragmentation of former Yugoslavia gave a new impetus for the narrative of “balkanization”—that is, the perception of the Balkans as a place of savage ethnic conflicts, a “place where nothing is forgotten and nothing learned,” a “fracture zone,” a “continent’s powder keg”.<sup>25</sup> In the simplistic model that was spread through the media, the “ancestral hatred” in the Balkan world has been brought up as the main reason for the course of events, confirming the dark image of the Balkans already present in western imagination. This procedure involves an assumption that the West was a neutral observer in the process. This is an ideological assumption that obscures the complicity of the West in the course of events.

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<sup>24</sup> In his text “Social Change and the Balkans” Rastko Močnik has used data from the *United Nations Development Program. Human Development Report for Central and Eastern Europe* and the *CIS* (1999). <<http://www.eurozine.com/article/2003-03-20-mocnik-en.html>>. Web. 1 Nov. 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Vesna Goldsworthy in her critical text “Invention and in(ter)vention: The Rhetoric of Balkanization” has given an overview of references, among them the dark simplistic imaginary of Simon Winchester’s *The Fracture Zone: A Return to the Balkans* and Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts*. (Goldsworthy 25-38). In the eyes of democratic Europe, the brutality of civil war underlines the dark image of the Balkans, which Maria Todorova describes in her book *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). According to this image, the Balkans are semi-civilized, semi-colonial, semi-developed, and semi-oriental.



“Still today, the expansion of the European Union to include the “Balkans” remains incomplete and faces difficulties, of which the symbolic constraints are not the least important” (Le Rider 38-39).

In the following, two main processes will be addressed that characterize the transitional period: the process of nationalist/ethnic identification and the process of democratic “normalization.” What brings together these processes—the former led by the supporters of nationalist re-traditionalization and the latter led by the supporters of Europeanization—is a common tendency to push into oblivion the radical social and cultural achievements in bringing forth the democratic turn in Eastern Europe before the end of the Cold War. Boris Buden has explained this tendency as “the incapacitation, or putting under tutelage of the true subject of the democratic turn”:

Eastern Europe after 1989 resembles a landscape of historical ruins that is inhabited only by children, immature people unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another. They see themselves neither as subjects nor as authors of a democracy that they actually won through struggle and created by themselves. It has been expropriated from them through the idea and practice of the post-Communist transition, only to return now from the outside as a foreign object that they must re-appropriate in a long, hard and painful process. In the strange world of post-Communism, democracy appears at once as a goal to be reached and a lost object.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Boris Buden’s text “Als die Freiheit Kinder brauchte” is published in German in the book *Die Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2009). The text in English under the title “Children of Postcommunism” is available online. Web. 1 Nov. 2016.  
<<http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/children-of-postcommunism>>.

In the case of former Yugoslavia, the “true subject of the democratic turn” entered into the historical scene in the mid-1980s when a broader alternative culture “grew into one of the most potent cultural and political democratizing forces of the decade” (Djurić & Šuvaković 385). Marina Gržinić has explained, commenting on Ljubljana’s alternative movement of the 1980s, that it

was not simply a marginal movement that, ultimately, according to the logic of political isometrics, functioned as a reconfirmation of the center as center . . . [it] went beyond the counter-cultural attitude of the 1970s, demanding new cultural, political and artistic institutions and organizations to be formed, so to speak, within the very institutions of the socialist self-management paradigm of reality. (Gržinić 87-97).

The obsolete political slogans of late socialism could not meet the growing social and political demands of this radical democratic fermentation, met with suspicion by the League of Communists leading Yugoslavia at that time. As explained by Rastko Močnik who was also a participant in this democratic turn:

[T]he Slovenian communists broke up the last Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, whereupon they took the first plane to return to ‘their’ state. It did not occur to them that after a negative gesture it was possible to do something positive; they did not see the democratic fermentation throughout Yugoslavia, they failed to see the entire Yugoslavia expected democratic action of them, they did not want to know that they were in a position of being able to respond to the question posed by the historical moment. Neither they nor the later political

classes thought of looking over the national fence. (Močnik *How much* 15).

The Slovenian national fence later became a border preventing the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina to find shelter in Slovenia, while within the Slovene borders, the non-Slovenian minorities were being erased from the public archives. In reaction to these issues, during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rastko Močnik wrote his critical essays collected in 1995 under the title *Extravagantia II: How much fascism?*.<sup>27</sup>

In the mid-1980s, the radical democratic fermentation was even more important because Yugoslavia was caught up between two forms of conservatism: the petrification of the late socialist regime on the one side, and the oppositional-nationalist stream, on the other. In Serbia, dogmatic socialism was preparing for integration with Serbian nationalism, creating a deadly syncretism, which culminated by the beginning of the 1990s with the rise to power of Slobodan Milošević. In Slovenia and Croatia, the process of nationalist identification was also getting its momentum. Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in June 1991, and were recognized by most EU states. Yugoslavia collapsed, although Serbian nationalist military advance still acted under the banner of Yugoslav Army, which by the end of that year made the attacks on the historic old town of Dubrovnik and destroyed the town of Vukovar, thus taking over a significant part of Croatian territory. In spite of the imposition of arms embargo by the UN on all the republics of former Yugoslavia, the Serbs had already gained advantage by taking

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<sup>27</sup> The selection of essays by Rastko Močnik collected under the title *Extravagantia II: Koliko fašizma?* originally published in Slovenian in 1995 in the edition *Studia Humanitas Minora* Ljubljana, translated in Croatian in 1998 and published in the edition *Bastard* by Arkzin d.o.o. Zagreb. The selection from the Croatian edition is translated in English under the title *How Much Fascism?* and published by Prelom Kolektiv in *Red Thread e-journal* 1 (2009). Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <<http://www.red-thread.org/en/article.asp?a=19>>.

control of the weapons stocks of Yugoslav Army. At the beginning of 1992, the UN Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) established their headquarters in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was at that time perceived as “neutral” in the conflict between Serbia and Croatia. However, as the UNPROFOR troops were positioned along the lines of the Serb-held areas of Croatia, this enabled Milošević to transfer his military forces to Bosnia. The referendum held in Bosnia-Herzegovina in March 1992 resulted in the recognition of its independence by the USA and the EU member states in April that year. The citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina manifested their anti-war orientation in massive protests in Sarajevo, on 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1992. Two protestants were killed by the sniper fire from the posts controlled by the Serbian paramilitary troops. It was the day when the siege of Sarajevo started—it lasted 44 months, from 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1992 to 29<sup>th</sup> of February 1996. In only one decade from 1984 to 1994 Sarajevo went from being an open Olympic City to being a “testimonial name,” as Jean-Luc Nancy has written: “It is a dimensionless point on a diagram of sovereignty, an ortho-normative gauge on a ballistic and political computer, a target frozen in a telescopic sight, and it is the very figure of taking aim . . . Sarajevo is simply a name or a sign that grabs our attention, so that there will no longer be a Sarajevo landscape, or trips to Sarajevo, but only pure and naked identity” (145).

The *shooting down* of the Yugoslav project was undoubtedly a traumatic event that has affected several generations of people. The philosophers like Jean-Luc Nancy in his book *Being Singular Plural* and Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* have dealt with the complex issue of naked identity and regarded the dissolution of Yugoslavia as a symptom of the “normalization” of the state of exception rather than as “prelude to new social contracts and new national and State localizations” (Agamben, *Homo* 28). Within the narrative of transition, however, the horrors of war in

former Yugoslavia have been generally explained as a temporary regression and local issue. With the proper guidance from the democratic world, this situation will, according to this narrative, eventually turn to normality. Drawing from Agamben, Boris Buden has recognized in this narrative a revival of Hobbesian myth, according to which the war was a bloody intermezzo between the canceling of an old social contract based on the communist power and the implementation of a new contract based on the principles of democracy. In the process, everything related to the previous contract had to be annulled, erased from memory, so that the new contract might be absorbed properly.

According to this narrative, the national (ethnic) identity was suppressed in the socialist era in former Yugoslavia due to its “supranational” orientation, as if national identity would be something naturally given and based in the “inherent biologic-cultural inclinations” (Hedetoft 27). The post-communist ethno-nationalism in disintegrating Yugoslavia was characterized by searching for the “roots” and looking for a foundation in religion and folklore. This was a model of the production of national identity through the manipulation of cultural memory, as explained by Jacques le Rider in his contribution to the volume *Media and Cultural Memory*:

The distinction between Byzantine Europe and Central Europe, and later between Islam and Christianity, created religious and cultural borders separating the Orthodox peoples from the small islands of Islam, which still exist in the Balkans, and Catholics from Protestants. These borders are *lieux de mémoire*, which have often served to justify discourses of rejection (Russophobe or anti-Serbian), or to explain conflicts in the post-Communist era, particularly in the territory of former Yugoslavia. However, the secularization of European culture renders it impossible to reduce contemporary conflicts to religious wars. These

religious borders are *lieux de mémoire* manipulated by neo-nationalistic propaganda. Yet forgetting them would also be unfortunate. (Le Rider 38).

Neo-nationalistic propaganda was based in the stigmatization of the enemies and the simultaneous celebration of national identity, allegedly given beforehand, which, however, took shape retroactively as a response to the threats to “our” identity. The national identity is a mechanism of producing and entertaining the integrative illusion and the effect of totality (Anderson; Smith). In psychoanalytic reading, the externalization of auto-negativity and its projection to the other is a narcissistic exclusionary limit fixing the identity of both self and other. All social formations are essentially unstable because their positive consistency depends upon the exclusion of a surplus negativity, which can never be fully mastered or resolved. It has thus become necessary to offer a radical critique of the logic of closure and totality, and psychoanalysis as critical theory has enabled such critique.

Psychoanalysis provides the means to understand the dynamic of nationalism as well as to move beyond the division between its “good” and “bad” elements. In the psychoanalytic perspective, the nation is “what ‘always returns’ as the traumatic element around which fantasies weave. Thus it enables the articulation of the fantasy structure that serves as a support for ethnic hatred” (Salecl 211). Following Ernesto Laclau’s premises in *The Making of Political Identities*, Renata Salecl has explained how the identity crisis in Yugoslavia began already with the crisis of self-management in the 1970s when “the elements, which had until then formed an ideological structure, now achieved independence and began functioning as ‘floating signifiers’ awaiting new articulation” (Salecl 208). This explanation has aligned with the meaning of hegemony in Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: a partial fixation of meaning is happening around certain nodal points, and nodal points are privileged signs around

which the other signs are ordered (Laclau and Mouffe 112). In national discourses a nodal point is “the people.” But the sign “people” is empty in itself, it does not acquire detailed meaning until it is inserted in a particular discourse. It is a floating signifier that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way. By the end of the 1980s, a new series of, primarily national, points of identification, emerged which totally redefined the terms of the struggle for ideological hegemony:

The national threat became the strongest point of identification on which the opposition as well as establishment relied. So, on the one hand, local establishment figures strengthened their position by stressing their role in defending the nation against other nations while, on the other hand, part of the opposition also presented national sovereignty as the main aim of the political struggle . . . What must be acknowledged here is that the people cannot be deceived unless they are already structured in such a way that they want to be deceived. Or, to put it another way, people themselves articulate a desire for their own deception. (Salecl 210)

Especially influential in this analysis were the above addressed premises of Jacques Lacan’s theory of identification elaborated in his *Seminar XI*, with its explicit assertion that there is a lack at the root of any identity. This assertion became a basis for a radical political logic in the hegemony theory developed by Ernesto Laclau. Laclau has argued that identity cannot be understood as something fixed, and proposed its radical contextualization, based on the hegemonic re-composition of fragmented identities.

It is important to recall here the notion of borderline-type subjectivity and its symptoms that post-Yugoslav artists embraced strategically to counteract the dominant processes of identification based upon the willingness to be deceived into the illusion of

totality as a way of protection against the national threat. For example, a series of photographic portraits titled *Ostali/ostali* [Others/stayed] (2014) by Bosnian artist Andrej Džerković (See Appendix) consists of portraits of the citizens of Sarajevo and personal friends of the author who do not imbed into the national classification in Bosnian contemporary society. These are also portraits of the people who during the siege stayed in the city. The portrayed persons proudly do not accept the present division according to ethnicity and the oblivion of common antifascist past of multiethnic socialist Yugoslavia. In war and post-war reality this socio-political struggle against oblivion of past struggles and social experience was even more important than the military defense against the aggression. Nationalist on all sides were determined to remind Bosnians of their respective ethnic identities (the pressure that continues today: officially, to identify oneself as a “Bosnian” without accompanying ethnic qualification means to place oneself into the category of “others”). Many of the citizens who stayed in Sarajevo during the war later decided to leave the city, disillusioned and defeated not in a military but in a socio-cultural sense. The place they fought for no longer exists.

On the other hand, there is a specific issue of the identity of Bosnian Muslim, with its precarious position in the middle of Christian Europe and with its historical consciousness primarily defined through the principles of Yugoslav multiethnic and supranational antifascist socialism. Bosnian artist Damir Nikšić (See Appendix) is using his own portrait in order to point to all the nuances of this issue, historical, cultural, sociological, religious, political, psychological, aesthetic and ethical, disclosing the traps of mythologization on the one side and the void in historical consciousness on the other.

The hysterical questioning, subjective destitution, traversing the fantasy, accepting the excremental position—these are all the aspects of artistic positioning across former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Yugoslav principles of



Brotherhood and Unity have been cherished with utmost enthusiasm, and where the same principles have been crushed most violently.

The question remains how this positioning relates to the broader issue of the changing concept of art in the age of culture at the turn of the century, taking into consideration the construction of cultural identities and the negotiation between them. The artworld has also been the arena where the framing of this issue has been demonstrated.

Among the first significant comprehensive overviews of the post-1989 Eastern European art practices was the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*.<sup>28</sup> In the years following this exhibition, several prominent European art institutions launched various exhibition-projects focused on Balkan art.<sup>29</sup> The common aim of these projects has been to offer a critical reevaluation of negative stereotypes about the region reproduced especially during the conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

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<sup>28</sup> The exhibition *After the Wall* was curated by Bojana Pejić, David Elliot and Iris Müller-Westerman in Moderna Museet Stockholm in 1999 (also in Museum of Contemporary Art Foundation Ludwig Budapest, 2000 and in Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin, 2000-2001). The exhibition was organized in four thematic sections: borrowing from Joseph Beuys, the first section titled “Social Sculpture” dealt with socially relevant topics from religion to mass media; the second section “Re-Inventing the Past” included works that refer to the World War II or to Communist ideology. Finally, “Questioning the Subjectivity” focused mostly on artistic self-portraits that problematize artists’ status in society, and the section “Genderscapes” put the focus on self-representations that open up the issues of gender roles, violence, body’s fragility and mortality. See Pejić.

<sup>29</sup> The exhibition *In Search of Balkania*, curated by Roger Conover, Eda Čufer, and Peter Weibel (Neue Galerie Graz, fall 2002), the exhibition *Blood and Honey – Future is in the Balkans*, curated by Harald Szeemann (Essl Collection in Klosternburg, near Vienna, spring 2003), and the exhibition *In the Gorges of the Balkans - A Report*, curated by René Block (Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel, summer 2003).

René Block's exhibition *In the Gorges of the Balkans* was a telling example, pointing to the material reports from concrete places, from Borderland. These reports from Borderland took form of the actions *in situ* in the second part of the project, including various activities in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sofia, Bucharest, Tirana, Pristina, Belgrade, Cetinje, Skopje and Istanbul. The project concluded with a symposium organized by Marius Babiush and Bojana Pejić on the topic "The Reinventing of the Balkans – Geopolitics, Art and Culture in Southeastern Europe."

In the case of Harald Szeeman's exhibition *Blood and Honey-The Future is in the Balkans*, "the conceptual focus of the exhibition . . . refers to the term Balkan. We can extend "Balkans" by looking at its etymology as well as morphology. Dividing the term itself, we see a discourse, a play of opposites. The Turkish syllables BAL (Honey) and KAN (Blood) open spaces of reflection."<sup>30</sup> If the image of the Balkans reinvented by these projects was that of admired variety rather than that of despised barbarism, the question that followed was how should this image function in the context of contemporary art as global art.

In her text "Marketing Differences: The Balkans on Display" Louisa Avgita has warned about the tendency, which was rather a support than an opposition to the established stereotypes in the context of transnational capitalism. The logic of transnational capitalism has implied "the counter movement of regionalism and tribalization, whether national, cultural, or religious . . . Difference, with the label of a foreign culture, has become marketable and thus an entrance ticket for newcomers on the

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<sup>30</sup> The summary provided by Nicole Haitzinger in "Bal-Kan- the irritation of lingua: A few notes on the exhibition *Blood and Honey-the future's in the Balkans*." *ArtMargins online* (2003). Web. 1. Nov. 2016. <<http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/8-archive/277-bal-kan-the-irritation-of-lingua-a-few-notes-on-the-exhibition-qblood-and-honey-the-futures-in-the-balkansq>>.

art market,” as explained by Hans Belting (*Global* 40). With regard to this issue, the crucial point has been made by Marina Gržinić in her arguments against the “abstract sanitized transfer” of the works from their original context to the globalized art scene without allowing “the noise or waste of real space to come truly closer, the entire poverty, social relations and possible ideological and intellectual implications that the work of art produces in its original context” (*Re-politicizing* 15).

The artists have thus employed strategies to avoid such sanitized transfer. One of the telling examples have been the works by Bosnian artist Alma Suljević (see Appendix), who participated in both exhibitions *In the Gorges of the Balkans* and *Blood and Honey-The Future is in the Balkans*. In the former, she presented her action dedicated to the clearance of the still existing minefields in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Her work in progress has marked this traumatic territory, which cut across the political territories. She then takes the soil from these minefields, fills it in specially produced bags and then sells the bags in the city markets, usually near some religious edifice, thus calling attention to the complicity of culture, religion and market in the manipulation of war and misery. She also uses the intervention strategy, dressing-up as a female terrorist: clothed in nikab with explosive devices strapped to her, she appeared at the opening of Szeeman’s exhibition *Blood and Honey*, shocking the audience at the gallery space of the Essl Collection in Vienna. The tryptich *Hommage a Szeeman* was created after his death. It consists of three photographs: one showing her gazing into the camera, the other reading Fatiha, the first chapter of the Koran, as a gesture of honoring the dead, and in between the *Kiss*, an image taken at the opening of the exhibition *Blood and Honey* [Figure 6].

Curatorial statements of the third curatorial project *In Search of Balkania* by Roger Conover, Eda Čufer, and Peter Weibel have emphasized that they did not comply with

the “wisdom” of the art market, finally accepting the peripheral activities as a legitimate field of curatorial endeavor. Rather, they wanted to put through the awareness of the symbolic geography of the Balkans, setting the viewer on “a symbolic journey through the stations of Balkanic knowledge” (Conover, Čufer, Weibel 3). Within the framework of this curatorial project, a book addressing the facets of Balkanic knowledge was published under the title *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, edited by Dušan I. Bijelić and Obrad Savić, as an “act of resistance against the many forms of representation,” in an analogy with problematization of Orientalism. The authors have proposed to regard the idea of “Balkan” as a metaphor that is being used and abused, appropriated pejoratively and celebrated nostalgically, in the context of a contemporary global market, economic and cultural colonization, neoliberal ideology of multiculturalism, UN-NATO world mapping, and post-socialist and neo-nationalist memory politics (Močnik “The Balkans” 79-116). And Étienne Balibar in “The Borders of Europe” has called for a reconsideration of the situation in the Balkans as an effect of the neoliberal and neocolonial European politics that neglects particular histories and cripples the production of critical knowledge. In his text “From Berlin to Sarajevo” Sarajevo-based philosopher Ugo Vlaisavljević has explained this as a process of zonification, whereby the mobility of borders corresponds to the expansion of the European Union and the expansion of capitalism at the global level.

#### **1.4 CONTRADICTIONS UNRESOLVED. BORDERLAND, HEROES, AND WAR REALITY**

Critically reflected memory of the past is the crucial issue in approaching the contradictions of the contemporary geo-political conjuncture. The major instrument in the process of transition is reconstruction of collective identity through reshaping collective memories: the monuments and images representing historical figures have been destroyed or removed; the streets, squares, bridges, buildings have changed their names; institutions and sites have been reappropriated; new types of festivities have been created; new memory spaces and burial grounds have been built.<sup>31</sup> In the countries in transition, the politics of memory is a contested and dangerous territory, as there is a “dissonant heritage” (Tunbridge and Ashworth) that continuously provokes further hostilities. To consider, for example, how a designation “Yugoslavian” has become a stigma: from the neo-nationalistic point of view, this designation has been perceived as the possibility of some other, not welcome any more, social totality. For this reason, the notion “Yugoslavian” became “the worst imaginable thing,” as problematized by Theoretician Šefik Tatlić in his text “New Fascisms. Enjoying Trauma, Social Perversion in the Process of Transition.”

The garbage dumps where the images of the socialist past have ended up appear as “the residues of a dreamworld” (Buck-Morss, “The City” 4). A photographic series *Brotherhood and Unity* [Figure 1-2] by Slovenian artist Marija Mojca Pungerčar (See Appendix) bears a name of the main traffic route in former Yugoslavia, built in the 1950s and the 1960s by mostly young volunteers in the aftermath of World War II. The artist has used the old photographs made by her father and paired them with the

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<sup>31</sup> On the reconstruction of identity through reshaping of collective memories see: Dragičević-Šešić’s analysis “Cultural Policies, Identities and Monument Building in Southeastern Europe” (31-46).

photographs of exactly the same locations forty years later, when the road has been reconstructed by underpaid laborers employed by various companies. With the construction of the new highway, most of the old one has been demolished and rebuilt anew. The key method in the work is a dialectical juxtaposition of old and new images, or old and new visual realities in order to re-frame their social significance, but without reconciliation. Whereas in former times, the voluntary action has been an opportunity to get to know the people of different backgrounds and to participate together in building up the new society, four decades later they meet on the same road on the basis of a seasonal work devoid of any sense of community. In post-Yugoslav critical artistic practices, there is a transgressive surplus, which is meant to engage with an unrealized political reality (dreamworld) and to confront the conflicting social imagination and its cultural articulation.

The critical interventions in the politics of memory are necessary in the territory where exists a multiplicity of identities and heterogeneity of traditions that have shared their common socialist past. In his text “Project Yugoslavia. The Dialectics of the Revolution,” Ozren Pupovac has raised a crucial question:

Let us put this straight: does this heterogeneity and, what is more, contradictority of forms of unity and antagonism which we have seen to characterize the Yugoslav project add up to and resolve with a dialectical synthesis, or does it rather imply a further movement of contradiction, a development without a synthetic moment? . . . And this is precisely where we can find the historical significance and singularity of Yugoslavia: in the fact that it represents a contradictory unity of contradictions. A unity, which, moreover, stands under the constant pressure of partition and transformation (Pupovac 18).

That makes the issue of collective memory extremely complicated to address, as well as impossible to avoid because it is interwoven with people's everyday lives. The symptom does not allow for a peaceful coexistence of totally contradictory convictions, and it also stands for authorizing something for historical repetition. There are two levels in the function of art as cultural symptomatology: the revision of historical settings and the framing of the contemporary condition. Among the striking cases is that of the status of war memorials. This question has been raised in a radical manner by the *Spomenik Group* in Belgrade. The group was formed with the aim to problematize the "Memorial dedicated to wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia." The memorial was commissioned by the Belgrade City Municipality, but the crucial dilemma emerged right from the start and subsequently disabled the further process of realizing such memorial. That is the dilemma of finding a proper name. Each new open call for the name proposals generated only new discussions. The *Spomenik Group* thus decided to start with the question itself: "What is the Name of War Today?"<sup>32</sup>

In his contribution to the book *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, titled "South Slav Identity and the Ultimate War Reality," Ugo Vlaisavljević has drawn from Anthony D. Smith's general classifications of ethnic communities, in order to posit that the Balkan *ethnie* may be classified as "frontier"

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<sup>32</sup> Spomenik Group has translated, discussed and distributed excerpts from the text *Qu'appelle-t-on une guerre? Enquete sur le nom de guerre aujourd'hui* by Catherine Hass. These translation groups have raised questions regarding the contemporary conception of war and regarding the critical and engaged discussion about the wars of the 1990s. In 2008, they initiated the project Mathemes of Re-association, focusing on Srebrenica genocide, and examining the conditions under which art can produce its own discourse on the topic of permanent war. Web. 1 Nov 2016.

<<https://grupaspomenik.wordpress.com/mathemes-of-re-assotiation/>>.

*ethnie*. The “frontier” position was partly geopolitical and partly strategic-economic.<sup>33</sup> This has been a difficult position, in which the greatest danger has not been war itself but its long-term consequences that always bring about a shift in the dominant cultural code of small nations, causing a whole series of reconstitutions that affect the reality of the collective self:

It might be said, at the price of oversimplification, that when we try to explain war as an effect of numerous *causes*, we tend to look at it from the perspective of a large nation . . . Conversely, when we try to explain war as a cause of numerous *effects*, we look at it from the perspective of a small nation (Vlaisavljević 197).

Viewed from this perspective, war appears to be the event that constitutes small nations. The historical, cultural, and political reality of small nations is, according to Vlaisavljević, markedly a “war reality.” He has described the Balkan war reality as a “regime of proper names” in which the most proper names have been the names of war heroes. Memorial sites of the battlefield as “the place where the most proper of all proper names are planted,” “where a proper name was inscribed in the earth,” are thus invested with memory, not only in order to save the past from oblivion but also to defend the symbolic territory in the present. In the territory of former Yugoslavia, the scattered collection of socialist memorials, with their peculiar forms, is now imbued with deep ambiguity: visually powerful and almost invisible at the same time. Many monuments were destroyed or vandalized by nationalist forces in the early 1990s. They stand as

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<sup>33</sup> There is a differentiation between the Western model of the nation that arose out of the Western absolutist states, and the Eastern model of the nation emerged out of the situation of incorporated ethnic communities fighting to liberate themselves from the shackles of various empires.



[W]itnesses of an unrealized future, or specters that continue to haunt the present . . . A vast majority of the monuments were erected on historic sites of the partisan struggle . . . amidst the open landscapes . . . As physical witnesses, the monuments are not only witnesses of the World War II and the partisan struggle, but they have become monuments to Yugoslavia itself; to its irreverently progressive anti-nationalist and anti-fascist perspective. They maintain an invisible network throughout the territory of former Yugoslavia and make apparent the disruption and segmentation of a formerly common space (Kirn and Burghardt 66).

This segmentation has at once to be “acknowledged and affirmed,” Hito Steyerl has written upon seeing the broken letters of the names engraved into the partisan memorial Vraca on the hill above Sarajevo, which during the siege became a post for paramilitary forces and was destroyed purposefully for being a reminder of former unity: “We have to learn to read those letters—not by restoring their original meaning, but by inventing a new one, and with it, a new language of emancipation” (Steyerl, “The Archive” 232).

To learn to read those letters anew means to recollect the memory of the anti-fascist struggle not as a piece of closed history but in Walter Benjamin’s sense as an awakening signal in our own present. With the anti-fascist struggle in World War II (the People’s Liberation Struggle), the small South Slav nations became, for the first time, the genuine creators of their own histories and realities. The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was a result of mass suffering and partisan victory in World War II. This victory has been regarded at once as Communist revolution and the liberation of the people (e.g. people’s nations). The life-long president of SFRY Josip Broz Tito relied on this ideological couplet between the working class and the nation, between “free communist society” and “national cohabitation in brotherhood and unity.” The slogan

“Brotherhood and Unity” meant, in the first place, the unity of already recognized ethnic communities. The public discourse, for all existing *ethnie*, almost exclusively used the expression “our people” (the empty universal in Laclau’s sense):

This allows us to grasp how the Yugoslav project realizes a contradictory figure of collectivity: a people, which is already a non-people . . . which includes a break with the logic of representation and identity on which the modern bourgeois construction of the State resides. Because the popular front, or the political unity formed in the antifascist struggle, is a “people” which resists its own representation and symbolization, a collective which is not exhaustible in an institutional referent . . . The “people” formed in 1943 is a “people” which is not identical to itself. This is because it proceeds from nothing, from emancipatory negativity as such. (Pupovac 19).

This image of a “people” is embodied in the figures of the partisan heroes of People’s Liberation Struggle against fascism. Their names have been given to factories, institutions, nursery houses, streets and city squares. Some decades later, however, only the names of a few widely used products have remained, while the memories to the actual people have vanished. They thus suffered another more horrific symbolic death in oblivion. For example, the name of Nada Dimić, a partisan heroine who died at the age of nineteen, became a name of an underwear textile factory in Zagreb. The factory was renamed in the 1990s as “Endi International” and by 2000 it went into bankruptcy. The anti-fascist fighter has first become just a name dissociated from the person, and then even a name has been erased from public consciousness. In 1998, Croatian artist Sanja Iveković wanted to make an intervention on the façade of the former factory, but the managers of “Endy International” did not allow it. The project was finally realized in the year 2000, in the framework of the exhibition titled *What, How, and for Whom* dedicated

to the 152<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Communist Manifesto. The main organizer of the exhibition was journal *Arkzin*.<sup>34</sup> The curators Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sokolović took the moto *What, How and for Whom* as a permanent name of their curators' collective. Nataša Ilić wrote that

[T]o light the logo with the name of the heroine forgotten and turned into a brand name is not only about reestablishing her both as a person and a role model, but also about urban landscape appreciation. It shows sensitivity for urban layers of the past so crudely dismissed in the renovations undertaken during the 1990s. (Ilić and Kršić n. pag.).

Such works within new cultural landscape have functioned as the non-integrated symptoms testifying on the irreconcilable conflictual forces of post-socialist disintegration and neoliberal capitalist recuperation, the rise of new fascism, nationalist identification, and democratic "normalization." In the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia and the arrival of new war- and post-war reality, the names and stories of forgotten heroes have emerged again in the artistic works as cultural symptoms of displaced memory. For example, "Kraš" denoted a chocolate factory but not Josip Kraš (1900-1941), one of the founders of the newspaper *Borba* (eng. Struggle), who was killed in confrontation with domestic fascists. In order to problematize this phenomenon

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<sup>34</sup> The journal *Arkzin*, founded in 1991, had a crucial role in connecting art and multimedia practices, radical design, and political anti-war activism. During the 1990s, *Arkzin* published Sanja Iveković's series titled "Gen XX. People's Heroines" which consists of a series of fashion photographs of women combined with the names of the heroines who lost their lives in the World War II. Digitalization of the *Arkzin* issues has been realized as part of the collaborative project *Aesthetic Education Expanded* by Center for New Media-kuda.org, Berliner Gazette, Kontrapunkt (Macedonia) and Kulturtreger/Booksa and Multimedial Institute (Croatia). Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <<http://www.kuda.org/sr/pro-irena-estetska-edukacija-aesthetic-education-expanded-2015-2017>>.

of displaced memory, Sarajevo-born artist Nebojša Šerić Shoba (See Appendix) made a series titled “Heroes” in 1999, in which the portraits of five antifascist heroes (Marijan Badel, Vlado Bagat, Rudi Čajavec, Rade Končar and Josip Kraš) were juxtaposed with the products of the factories named after them: Badel liquor, Bagat sewing machine, Končar TV set, Čajavec heater, and a box of Kraš chocolate. The products were placed on pedestals below the photographs hanging on the wall. After the names of the anti-fascist fighters have been removed from public discourse, the only “heroes” that survived were these brands. With the arrival of the new more attractive brands from the developed capitalist world, they too became relics of the long-gone past. This work was presented at the above-mentioned exhibition *In Search of Balkania* in Graz in 2002, as well as at the 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial in 2003, in the first post-war pavilion of Bosnia-Herzegovina as independent state. The work was also a part of the project *De-Construction of Monument*, initiated by Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art in 2003.<sup>35</sup> The exhibition included the artists who reacted to the post-war reality by bringing “the topics into the cultural landscape from which it is possible to read a new relation between art and society” (Adamović 13). Driving such practices was a need to cope with the turbulent historic changes that accompanied the transition from one system to another, the erasure of memory, the experience of separation and loss, and the contradictions of everyday reality:

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<sup>35</sup> Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art with Dunja Blažević as its director, was important promoter of critical contemporary art in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the turn of the century. It was founded in 1996 as Soros Center for Contemporary Art by the Open Society Fund Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since 2000 it has operated as an independent, non-profit professional organization. A project titled *De/construction of Monument* organized by Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art, included artists presentation, discussions, forums, exhibitions, artistic interventions in public space, art and media production, publications, political platforms and new monuments. Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <<http://scca.ba/scca-projects/deconstruction-of-monument/>>.

This art uses and explores new media and art forms, poses questions, deals with social traumas, demystifies traditional notions of art as well as collective ideological patterns and truths. This “other” art with its practice—its method of organization, its working strategies, and spheres of interest—has the potential to change the dominant cultural models and thought matrices. Since the nineties, the genesis of the theme *De/construction of Monument* has been witnessed in the work of artists ranging from Mladen Stilinović, IRWIN, Sanja Iveković, and Raša Todosijević to the youngest generation . . . What they have in common is the critical interpretation of the symbolic presentation of the old, the renewed or the new ideological constructs, or else the re-affirmation of forgotten figures and symbols. (Blažević 8).

For example, the artistic action “By the Commission’s decision: everyone to his own” by Sarajevo-based artists Kurt and Plasto has pledged for the return of the busts of eight Bosnian-Herzegovinian writers to their original places, on the pedestals at the Liberation Square in the center of the city of Sarajevo. The busts were removed from the pedestals in the beginning of the siege of Sarajevo in 1992 in order to be protected, but after the end of the war, due to political disagreements of who of them would still deserve a public honoring, they have not been brought back, until this action took place and activated critical reflection on the issues of collective memory. Another work by these artists, titled “My role and place in contemporary democratic processes,” shows a 30-year period in which both they and their country went through radical transformation. Kurt and Plasto have defined the extent of this transformation as “the change of the system software within the human brain” (qtd. in Conover et al. 83). This work was presented at the aforementioned exhibition *In Search of Balkania* in Graz in 2002. It consisted of an archive of items such as certificates, diplomas, documents, and

photographs as a generational story that surpasses a simplistic documentary interpretation. It is a story of growing up and schooling during socialism and around the 1984 Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo, followed by their military service in the Yugoslav Army, and then by the years they fought as soldiers in the Bosnian army during the war, and finally, trying to adjust to the new circumstances in the post-war years.

The post-war art scene was characterized by this generation of artists who created their works directly from personal war experiences. They were students at the Sarajevo Academy of Fine Arts when the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina broke out in 1992. Many of them in just a few months became soldiers on the frontline. One of the striking works is a juxtaposition of two photographs of Nebojša Šerić Shoba (See Appendix) in dramatically different landscapes, one taken in Monte Carlo, and the other in the trenches during the war, “relating them as sites where opposites interact: life/death, pleasure/pain” (Mandić 96).

Among the important initiatives was a public project titled *Bosnian Girl* by Šejla Kamerić (see Appendix), entailing the series of billboards, posters, magazine adds and postcards. The title of the work is a reference to graffiti left by a Dutch soldier on the wall of the army barrack in the area of Srebrenica. Artist’s own portrait is placed as a background for a vulgar content of this graffiti that describes Bosnian girl as less than nothing, an “excremental remainder.” To recall Marina Gržinić, “from this inherently excremental position,” it is now possible to “arise or can be perceived finally as a subject” (51). The advertisement aesthetic of the poster showing a beautiful young woman is contrasted by the intensity of her gaze. This fearless gaze embraces the degrading definition as its own zero-positioning from which it is able to question the broader issues of identity formation, personal and collective. There is another aspect to

the work, which relates to the time of its production. It was produced one decade after the time when the graffiti were written, the time when the massacre in Srebrenica took place. Details on Srebrenica massacre are provided in Chapter Four in relation to the project 11/7/95 by Tarik Samarah, photographer who recorded the infamous graffiti left by the soldiers in the area. This belatedness of the work relates to the issue of traumatic reemergence of the effects of war, which could not be experienced fully at the time of their occurrence.

Many of the works by Bosnian-Herzegovinian artists can be read precisely within this enigmatic logic: as structural forms that attempt to replicate or re-present the traumatic events in such a way that the experience can be mastered retrospectively. The work *Mankind* by Maja Bajević (see Appendix) consists of three pairs of photographs that reconstruct the memories of two catastrophic events in different contexts: the destruction of the UNIS towers of Sarajevo in 1992, and the tragedy of New York on September 11, 2001 [Figure 3-5]. What unites them is a process of working on the photographs—they are embroidered with the motives from Bosnian carpets. The process of embroidering acquires a function of working-through trauma, one's own and that of the other people. The handwork literary touches the sublime icons of destruction and inscribes into them the familiar pattern from domestic environment. The other works of Maja Bajević also deal with this dynamic between home and society, the intertwining between personal and collective tragedy.

The war and post-war reality is thoroughly marked by the experience of separation from home and loved ones. For example, a moment of a family encounter after the war was documented in a photograph and turned into a continuing art performance. On this occasion, the members of a family circle met, for the first time since the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina started, on the occasion of Second Cetinje Biennial in 1994. These were

members and friends of Jusuf Hadžifejzović (see Appendix), one of the key participants of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian art scene since the 1980s. The photograph titled *Fear of Drinking Water* [Figure 7] has become the basis of his continuous performance for the next twenty years. The phrase “Fear of Drinking Water” points to the individual, family and collective trauma, as well as to the inability to adjust to the new reality.

Two decades later, the work in progress “Memory Lane” by young artist Adela Jušić (see Appendix) developed out of the same experience of loss and remembrance, in the process of searching for the old family photographs and their re-arranging with those taken during the war [Figure 8-11]. The work is dedicated to her grandparents who survived the World War II, and to her father who lost his life as a soldier in Bosnian-Herzegovinian army in the 1990s. The same photograph reappears in her other works as the most important figure on the horizon of childhood memories.

As discussed in the previous chapters, a historical moment of the mid-1980s in former Yugoslavia was characterized by the clash between conservative petrification of the socialist regime and democratic fermentation within the subversive cultural scene. A historical moment of the mid-1990s was characterized by an intensification of nationalist tendencies within the official culture, and the commitment to cultural resistance through new forms of presentation and communication within the “alternative” culture.<sup>36</sup> As Marina Gržinić has testified

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<sup>36</sup> See for example the interviews with artists, critics and curators in the volume *From Consideration to Commitment. Art in Critical Confrontation to Society. Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, Zagreb 1990-2010*. Web. 1 Nov 2016. < <http://inseecp.blogspot.ba/2011/04/e-book-art-in-critical-confrontation-to.html>>.



There was an active cultural exchange between Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Skopje and other cities, and a common mental, cultural, and art space, far broader than we dare imagine. Through contemporary productions and radical thinking, important connections between these centers still exist—the link being provided by a new generation of artists and theorists (Gržinić 201).

In the decade that followed, the interconnection between the realms of art, curatorship, education, critical theory and cultural production, has brought about the category of the aesthetic as a field of struggle in the restructuration of the cultural field. These issues are linked to both social transformations and the transformation of visual aesthetics in the changed cultural landscape.

One of the main dilemmas relating to artistic positioning was the function of art within social antagonisms. “Can it avoid becoming part of the power systems that create and perpetuate social antagonisms? Can it distance itself from these systems, and can it develop effective strategies of resistance?” These were the questions around which a symposium *Living with genocide* was organized at the Moderna Galerija Ljubljana in May 1996, dedicated to the topics of theory and art in times of war. In the course of the conference in response to this ethical crisis, the validity of following ideas were discussed: the idea of art as a transformative force in society, as well as the powerlessness of art when faced with concrete and urgent social issues, and the coercion of art practices by the system of power and dominance.

Faced with these problems, the organizers were looking for a way to take action to actually do something for the people of war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina. At that time in Sarajevo the cultural scene was self-organizing on multiple levels, from humanitarian actions to cultural activities. At the suggestion of Sarajevo artist Jadran Adamović and

the Irwin group to the curators of the Moderna Galerija, Zdenka Badovinac and Igor Zabel, the decision was made to donate the works for the development of an international collection of contemporary art in Sarajevo under the name of Ars Aevi. The idea for the collection was born in war-torn Sarajevo in 1993, when the Obala Art Center organized the exhibition in the devastated space of the former cinema Sutjeska in the city center.<sup>37</sup> Izeta Gradjević, then director of the Obala Art Center, stated that the cinema Sutjeska was one of the most dangerous points in the city under siege, but to make artistic interventions there was a way to fight against the circumstances. In the midst of war, a series of important exhibition took place in the Obala Art Center by the artists such as Annie Leibovits, Jean-Christian Bourcart, Paul Lowe, Christian Boltanski. A collection of essays by a critic from Bosnia-Herzegovina Vojislav Vujanović, written during wartime, has reflected on these exhibitions and the power of creativity in the midst of destruction, and received an award from the Union of Journalists in 1997.

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<sup>37</sup> On the history of Ars Aevi collection see: Hadžiomerspahić. The first nucleus was the Milan Collection in 1994, followed by the new nuclei in Prato, Venice, Ljubljana, Bolognano, Istanbul, Zagreb, etc. The Ljubljana collection consisted of works by Marina Abramović, Evgeny Asse, Vadim Fiškin, Dmitry Gutov and Viktor Misiano, Mirosław Balka, Günther Brus, Sophie Calle, Richard Deacon, the Irwin group, Anish Kapoor, Marjetica Potrč, Thomas Schütte, Andres Serrano, Bill Viola, the group V.S.S.D. In June 1999, all the founding museums of Ars Aevi Collection nuclei transported the works of selected artists to Sarajevo. The Collection was first housed in the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, then in the Sarajevo Youth House and opened to visitors in the form of an exhibition depot. Ars Aevi was also the organizer of the first official Pavilion of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Venice Biennial in 2003. (Ten years before, during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1993, the artistic director of the 45. Venice Biennial Achille Bonito Oliva invited the exhibition “Witnesses of Existence” organized by Obala Art Center Sarajevo. The works were presented, but the artists were not able to leave the besieged city of Sarajevo). The 2003 selection by curator Asja Mandić was made to encompass art practice since the end of the war. Four artists from different generations were selected: Jusuf Hadžifejzović, Edin Numankadić, Maja Bajević and Nebojša Šerić Shoba.

Several speakers at the above mentioned Ljubljana conference *Living with the Genocide* stressed the fact that what an artist is obliged to do in reaction to an urgent social situation is only to create art. Igor Zabel has pointed out in a later text written about the conference that an understanding of the relationship between politicized and autonomous art is not fixed, but rather changes in accord with the circumstances. He drew from Theodor W. Adorno's essay "Commitment" the conclusion that "such tension and contradiction, however, are what still allow art to create values that cannot be completely absorbed either by the marketplace or by ideological functions, with the result that art continues to act as a point of resistance in society" (Zabel 75).

### **1.5     *KEEPING A SHRAPNEL OF A TRAUMATIC TIME***

The war, paradoxically, opened up a possibility to think about the category of aesthetic and how this category is inseparable from social life and ethical issues. When the values of society are collapsing, when life is lived parallel to death, artistic practice becomes a generator of ethical values, a "culture in becoming" (Cf. Hadžimuhamedović 7-18). In retrospect, this view acquires a specific meaning when it comes to the group of photographers in Bosnia-Herzegovina who entered a special chapter in the history of art photography in this part of the world. It is a special chapter due to the fact that these photographers turned away from commercial photography and photojournalism and dedicated themselves to the artistic use of photography precisely during the war in order to cope with everyday horrors, to gain distance over what they had seen as well as to "keep the shrapnel of a traumatic time" (Baer 7).

Most of them were working for the daily magazine *Oslobodjenje* (*Liberation*) that followed the events in Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and was published daily

during three and a half years under shelling and sniper fire. The journalist Tom Gjelten, author of a book about *Sarajevo Daily: A City and its Newspaper Under the Siege*, has written that “the commitment to normal life was demonstrated by the reporters, editors and photographers of *Oslobodjenje* . . . worked together and believed deeply in the cosmopolitan ideal that Sarajevo historically represented” (11).

The burning office of *Oslobodjenje* appeared on the front page of the issue from April 1992 in a photograph by Danilo Krstanović (see Appendix), one of those Sarajevo war photographers [Figure 12], who sought to capture the Sarajevo war reality, in which the everyday and the horrific intersected. “Before the war, I was a sports photographer,” he said, “actually, I was well prepared to shoot the war. Good reflexes, good instincts . . . Everyone would send their film to me and I’d use my magic to develop it, with no chemicals, no water. (qtd. in Fratkin 62-65).

Within critical contemporary artistic practices in the region of former Yugoslavia, the medium of photography has been employed to address the traumatic events, to counteract the manipulative functioning of mass media, to testify on the visible consequences of a collapsing economy and changing political system, to bring about the visual manifestation of the advancement of capitalism and the privatization of public space, as well as new forms of cultural colonization and historical oblivion.

The dramatic transformation can also be apprehended by following the destiny of a particular image, namely the destiny of the portrait of Josip Broz Tito, the former president of SFRY until his death in 1980. Sarajevo photographer Milomir Kovačević (see Appendix) made a series *Tito in War* as a chronicle of this destiny, from the celebratory display in the shop windows to the fall into garbage [Figure 13]. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kovačević found and photographed Tito’s portraits in the

ruins of the abandoned homes, offices, stores and schools in Sarajevo. The broken images did not simply register the social reality—they also brought its symptoms into view, contrasted with the images of the shop windows where the photograph of the deceased President was displayed honorably a decade ago, with black ribbon of mourning, following Tito's death in May 1980. The series of photographs titled *The Days of Pain and Pride* by Goranka Matić, Belgrade-based photographer, art historian, and editor, features those images taken during the days of mourning. The series, however, was not exhibited at a time it was made, but more than a decade later (1993/4), in a time of war and dramatically change political climate.<sup>38</sup>

At the very beginning of disintegration, Milomir Kovačević's series made a series titled *The War of Posters*, featuring the layers of posters in the city of Sarajevo, distributed in the first national elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1990. The visual chaos, demonstrating the political confusion and the aggressive manner of the nationalist campaigns, in a way announced the events to come. Despite this announcement, the people actually did not at all expect the war to break out. Kovačević himself, who certainly was not ignorant of the political situation, stated that "before the war actually started, we didn't get what was going on. We totally didn't get it . . . We didn't know what the fuss was all about: what war in Sarajevo? What siege? What army? . . . Slowly you just felt it on your skin, you couldn't grasp it, but you certainly felt it" (qtd. in Fratkin 141).

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<sup>38</sup> During the 1990s Goranka Matić was a photography editor of the Belgrade weekly magazine *Vreme* (Time), an independent news magazine in Serbia that was consistently critical towards Slobodan Milošević regime. Photographs that appeared on the front pages of *Vreme* provide an insight into the events of the 1990s.

During the siege of Sarajevo, Milomir Kovačević took over thirty thousand photographs, including the series *Dolls* and *Children in War*. The series *Dolls* [Figure 14] opens up the problems of truthfulness: the dolls are uncanny figures as they resemble human beings, and the injured dolls appear all over the city scape as condensed images of death, animated in the moment of insecurity whether we are looking at a living being or not. The series *Children* [Figure 15-16] opens up further the problem of dehumanization, as the photographs show the children with weapons posing consciously for the camera, looking directly at the viewers, challenging us to decipher what it is that we are seeing. These are not the images of children-warriors as it might appear at first glance with all its horrifying implications. These are children of the soldiers who were self-organized in the defense of the city under the siege. They were posing with their parents' real and improvised weapons. The obvious awareness of the camera and the returning gaze, the pose, the active involvement shows that the photographs were obviously staged, but this was not a game in which the children all over the world enjoy playing a role as grown up soldiers. They were actually identifying with their parents assuming that through this identification, at least in the realm of a photograph, they are also participating in the defense of their city.

Kovačević's first exhibition was in Sarajevo gallery Collegium artisticum in 1993. He had to light the space with candles, and each photo was on display as long as the candle in front of it burned turning the display into "a requiem of sorts." He asked himself: "what was the role of a photographer in those situations? . . . In the beginning, I was like others, taking pictures of death, of destruction. But after a while, you become kind of saturated with such sights. You see it every day and it becomes a norm" (qtd. in Fratking 142). Sarajevo war photographers began reacting against the normalization of death and destruction, and refused to participate in the media production of fear.

Photographer Nihad Nino Pušija, for example, refused to photograph a young girl who was shot dead in front of him, because he did not want “to feed the beast of fear”: “The sniper did not want to shoot me – I was carrying a camera. No, instead, I felt, I knew, that he intended it—that he shot her precisely so that I would photograph the dead body of the girl. Why? To produce more fear. That’s all that media did: fed the beast of fear” (qtd. in Fratkin 109). Sarajevo war photographers introduced a special chapter in the history of art photography because they used camera not as a picturing device but as a protection device: they made photographs not to feed the beast of fear but, as Kovačević stated, “to satisfy some of psychological need in those days; perhaps I created my own world in my photographs, which essentially helped me survive, mentally” (qtd. in Fratkin 142). As Bosnian critic Vojislav Vujanović has described, in Kovačević’s works:

[D]ocumentary and poetic transparency create a visual net within which they are involved in equal measure. This can have a bit of an unsettling effect on the viewer as he is put into a situation to wonder whether the artifact in front of him is one that emanates the pure artistic energy or is it a document. But, if the same viewer . . . lets himself to his own unconscious impulses, he will be able to establish a communication with the photograph, its content and its artistic treatment (247).

There is no “emotional sensationalism” in these photographs. There is a “calmness and inner dedication, one can observe these images for a long time without getting tired” (247). This view can be extended to other wartime photographers, such as Dejan Vekić (see Appendix), another chronicler of Sarajevo war reality [Figure 17-18]. Vekić worked on his series *KaoSarajevo* [ChaoSarajevo, As if Sarajevo] for three years documenting the scenes that would be considered ordinary if they had not been taking place in a dehumanizing war reality. The high level of ambivalence between ordinary life and war

conditions is what makes these images symptomatic. By documenting particular situations Vekić tried to depict the will of his fellow citizens to endure and to survive. The war also influenced the process of making photographs. Vekić was working as a photographer for the State Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes. However, he recognized at that time that his commitment as a photographer should go beyond this task:

My own work from that time was more about trying to capture the eerie atmosphere of the city. It was a ghost city, you know, with nobody on the streets. I was trying to find a sort of calm in the midst of the chaos, to balance out what I was shooting for the commission. Sometimes I would have two cameras with me, one loaded with color for the commission, one with black and white for myself. (qtd. in Fratkin 79-80).

One of these photographers is also Kemal Hadžić who was working since the 1970s for both commercial and artistic venues. In the 1980s he was a member of Sarajevo artistic group “Zvono” (Bell), and in the 1990s joined the army and continued to take photographs:

Once the war started, I realized that it was my duty to join the defense of the city. I had the opportunity to take photographs; I had access to sites and could photograph them at any time . . . The photographs I took became part of the army’s archives and are now part of the history of war . . . But I was never a photojournalist per se—I didn’t even have the right equipment . . . In a sense, it was through the war that I started acting as a ‘real’ artist . . . The photographs taken during the last years in Sarajevo remain very important to me. They are documents from a very difficult



period, from a time when life was lived parallel to death. (qtd. in Fratkan 15-17).

In societies affected by social conflicts and wars, where the politics of memory and oblivion creates a deep discordance between private memories, collective memories and recorded memories, the role of art as a zone of risk and experiment, historicity and politics, is of utmost importance, revealing the dynamic relation between the private and the public, intimacy and community, commitment and politicization. The main question remains how does the cultural imaginary circulate between personal desires, collective imagination and cultural representations. In this regard, the artists have tried to define their role and position between the East and the West, as well as between ideology and culture, memory and politics, past and present. This position calls for a concept of the un-assimilable, the symptom, which corresponds to the excess in psychic structuring of subjectivity and brings about the idea of social and political transgression located in reference to the instability and ambiguity of these aspects of psychic formation.



Figures 1-2: Marija Mojca Pungerčar, From the series *Brotherhood and Unity*, 2006. Photo by: Leopold Pungerčar, cca. 1958 (left), Nada Zgank, cca. 2006 (right). Source: *Aftermath*



Figure 3-5: Maja Bajević, *Mankind*, photo-embroidery series, mounted on cotton, hanging from a rope with cloth-pegs, 2003. Photography: Aćif Hodović, Augusto de Silva. Set-up view and Details.  
Source: *Home Again*, Exhibition at the National Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2006  
(Photo documentation: Dejan Vekić)





Figure 6: Alma Suljević, *Kiss (Hommage Harald Szeemann)*, 2005, Photo-tryptich, Detail. Photograph of the intervention by Alma Suljević at the opening of the exhibition *Blood and Honey – Future is in the Balkans* (curated by Harald Szeemann, Essl Collection in Klostersburg, near Vienna, spring 2003). Source: *Art and Terrorism*, curated by Irfan Hošić, Exhibition by City Gallery Bihać, 2009



Figure 7: Jusuf Hadžifejzović, *The Fear of Drinking Water*, since 1994. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 8-11: Adela Jušić, *Memory Lane*, 2012. Photo: Grandparents (above, left), Unknown photographer, early 1950's; Grandparents' children and their two cousins (above, right), Unknown photographer, around 1965; Grandparents with their two children (below, left), Unknown photographer, early 1960s; Father (below, right), Unknown photographer, end of 1992. Courtesy of the artist







Figure 13-14: Milomir Kovačević, from the series *Tito in War* (above); From the series *Dolls* (below), 1992-1995. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 15-16: Milomir Kovačević,  
From the series *Children in War*,  
1992-1995. Courtesy of the artist





Figure 17-18: Dejan Vekić, *Pushing a cart of water canisters through the city streets* (above), *Attention, Sniper!* (below), From the series *KaoSarajevo* [*ChaoSarajevo; As if Sarajevo*], 1993. Courtesy of the artist

## CHAPTER TWO

### VISUAL AESTHETICS OF TRANSGRESSION, OR WORKING WITH THE SYMPTOM

*So an economy of doubt is put into place with the thought of the symptom. The symptom effectively requires of me that I be uncertain about my knowledge of what I see and what I think I grasp.*

Georges Didi-Huberman (*Confronting* 181)

#### 2.1 A WAY OF ASKING QUESTION

In Chapter One, the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom has provided a way to approach the contradictory post-socialist condition, as well as to theorize the artistic positioning related to a borderline-type non-integrated subjectivity emerging within this condition, and in particular within former Yugoslavia war reality. Chapter Two envelops around the concept of the symptom when applied within visual culture and image theory, concerned with the notion of transgression—as operative not so much in the offensive or disturbing image, but rather in the images whose power lies in their ability to simultaneously create and interrupt the order of understanding by juxtaposing the unresolved contradictions. The starting point is a symptom-based model of the image interpretation developed by French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman. Relying on Sigmund Freud's theory of the symptom and Walter Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image, such model holds that the clash between thesis and antithesis does not end up in synthesis but in the emergence of the symptom (Didi-Huberman, "Dialogue" 191-226).

The processes deriving the symptom's formation are inherently dialectical, the symptom driven by the conflict with no resolution. The symptom is an arrest in the flow of thoughts, to use the vocabulary of Walter Benjamin, when thinking suddenly stops "in a configuration pregnant with tensions" (ILL 262).<sup>39</sup> Didi-Huberman relates the critical thinking in images by Walter Benjamin with the authors such as Sigmund Freud in his investigation of dreams and symptoms, Aby Warburg in his vertiginous visual methodology of *Mnemosine Atlas*, Carl Einstein's and George Bataille's project of the magazine *Documents*. In these perspectives, the juxtaposition of fragments aims to "symptomize the visible world," and to bring about the "issue of afterlife" (the temporality of the symptom), of the mnemonic survival of the image. These authors shared a common attention to the unconscious memory—the memory that cannot be told as much as should be interpreted through its symptoms—because the human is not a master or the owner of his/her images, but is rather delivered to, or possessed by, the images.

With its origins located in Sigmund Freud's early studies of hysteria, the symptom-based approach argues for an interpretative model able to account for contradictions that characterize the images, rather than seeking to provide an overarching explanation of meaning in the images. Such approach is concerned with the psychoanalytic issue of ambiguity and overdetermination. Freud's theorization of overdetermination relates to

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin's translated works and letters are referenced with the following abbreviations: AP: *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. London: Harvard University Press, 2002; C: *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*. Ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno. Trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994; ILL: *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*. [1969] Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007; W: *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et. al. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. P, 2008.

his understanding that the symptom does not behave predictably, so that it cannot be recorded and classified according to the iconography developed by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot. Freud regularly attended Charcot's Tuesday lectures at the Hôpital de Salpêtrière in 1885 and 1886. Using photography, Charcot developed a visual iconography whereby every symptom had to be classified according to a pre-existing taxonomy.<sup>40</sup> In analogy with Freud's notion of the symptom, the images, so Didi-Huberman, are ambiguous and "overdetermined," so that their contradictory complexity is unraveled, but the contradictions are not resolved:

The symptom exists—insists—only when a synthetic deduction, in the pacifying sense of the term, does not come into being . . . It symbolizes the events that have taken place and also events that have not taken place. It symbolizes each thing and also its contrary, being 'an ingeniously chosen piece of ambiguity with two meanings in complete mutual contradiction,' as Freud wrote. (Didi-Huberman, *Confronting* 178-179).

Not unrelated to Freud's rejection of Charcot's iconographic taxonomy, Didi-Huberman has used the concept of the overdetermined symptom to problematize the iconological model of image interpretation, based in Erwin Panofsky's methodology. Didi-Huberman criticized this methodology by referring to the ambiguity of meaning that is left unregistered in Panofskian model that "identifies symbol with symptom":

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<sup>40</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman's doctoral thesis, published in French in 1982 as *Invention de l'hystérie*, and in English translation as *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* in 2003.

It is not so much a question of trying to redistinguish the two concepts in the guise of a confrontation between the symptom of an artwork's aesthetic emotion and the symbol, for its part, considered as its theoretical equivalent, and thus theorizable. The question comes down, yet again, to accounting for the moment in which knowledge of the symbol is traumatized and interrupts itself in the face of the not-knowledge of the symptom, which in return opens and propels its symbolicity into an exponential spurt of all the conditions of meaning operative in an image. (179-180).

In his ongoing criticism of both idealism and positivism underpinning the discipline of art history regarding the problematics of representation, Didi-Huberman made two distinctions. The first distinction is that this problematic does not end with the modern understanding of figurative representability dominant since the 16th century. The second distinction is that in order to understand the image, it is necessary to pay attention to the very condition of the gaze, of and to something that "our knowledge had not yet been able to clarify" (16). "It is not visible in the sense of an object that is displayed or outlined; but neither it is invisible, for it strikes our eye." (17). He explains that it implicates "the gaze of a subject, its history, its fantasies, its internal divisions" (18). "With the visible, we are of course in the realm of what manifests itself. The visual, by contrast, would designate that irregular net of event-symptoms that reaches the visible" and whose "signifying 'material' is first of all the image" (31). The fundamental wager of this theory of the image as symptom is to think beyond both "the tyranny of the visible" and "the tyranny of the Idea" (75).

Drawing also from Lacan's interpretation of the symptom, Didi-Huberman based his analysis on the premise that the symptom does not present a stable set of signs and symbols, but it testifies to the slippage and ambiguity in the process of signification.

Lacanian subject remains forever split between being and meaning, while Didi-Huberman's subject is faced with the paradox between seeing and knowing: "to know without seeing, or to see without knowing. There is loss in either case . . . it is here that synthesis will become fragile to the point of collapse; and that the object of sight, eventually touched by a bit of the real, will dismantle the subject of knowledge" (140).

What has been changed by this approach is a way of asking question. Instead of asking the iconological question what we can know about images, the question is rather what we *cannot* know about them and how they are able to simultaneously create and interrupt the order of understanding. The image is defined by Didi-Huberman as a threshold, where we are at the same time invited to and forbidden the entrance into. This combination of invitation and denial is what makes Timothy Mitchell to confirm that there is something transgressive (although not offensive) in almost every image (Mitchell, *What* 128). The very condition of images is characterized by a radical incongruity between their surface and their content, which Gottfried Boehm calls 'iconic difference' in his influential text "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder" in the book that bears the unanswerable question *Was ist ein Bild?* as its very title. This basic characteristic is defined by the relation between the image and the viewer whose gaze brings the content from the surface into life. Images are not transgressive by themselves, only in relation to the viewer. Images, so Hans Belting, "do not exist by themselves, but they happen; they take place" (Belting, "Image" 302) through the media and through the bodies. For that reason, Belting considered the activity of animation better suitable to describe the use of images than the activity of perception: "we actually animate their media in order to experience images as alive" (307). There is a kind of anthropomorphism in this perspective, which is to be found among the key theoreticians of images in the last decades, as the relation to images is understood in analogy to the exchange of gazes in

human encounter. This is thoroughly analyzed by Sybille Krämer in her contribution to the volume *Maßlose Bilder. Visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression*:

Und schließlich muss dieser Blickwechsel etwas sein, was dem Betrachter widerfährt und seiner solitären Kontrolle nicht unterliegt, mithin ein Verhältnis instantiiert, das den betrachter berührt und ergreift. . . Das Bild, das wir betrachten, erwirbt dabei eine Art von “Öffnung”, die wir als “Verlust”, “Leere” erfahren, als etwas am Bild, das dunkel und unklar bleibt und sich also der Anschaubarkeit gerade entzieht. Die Bilderfahrung produziert nicht einfach einen lesbaren, erkennbaren, verstehbaren Bildsinn, sondern konfrontiert uns mit einer Ungewissheit und einem Entzug. Der Sichtbarkeit des Bildes ist somit eine Unsichtbarkeit inkorporiert. “Genau dadurch aber,” betont Didi-Huberman, “ist das Bild in der Lage, uns anzublicken. (Krämer 30-31).<sup>41</sup>

Thus the images cease to be solely the visible objects and become living presence able to “look back at us” (Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Ce que nous voyons*). However, instead of robbing images of their otherness by identifying them with the subject, this anthropomorphism had the inverse effect of “understanding human life through the life of images.”<sup>42</sup> The basic premise is that images are able to return the gaze because they confront us with something unapproachable within ourselves:

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<sup>41</sup> Krämer has started from a hypothesis that the human eye contact is a model for our contact with images, concluding that images are not solely the objects of observation but also tools of understanding and weapons in power struggles. (17-36).

<sup>42</sup> In the volume *Life and Death of Images*, Diarmuid Costello has emphasized that the authors discuss “the question of how we might understand the image, often but not always the artwork, as a form of life, more specifically a form of damaged or endangered life—life threatened by death. This idea can be approached from either of two ends; from one perspective, ethical and political issues generate implications for aesthetics; from the other, issues in aesthetic generate ethical and political implications” (16-17).

The image of the seer seen is of course a topos in poetry and poetics in the wake of romanticism (for example, Baudelaire, Valéry, Rilke, and Hofmannsthal) as well as in phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and metapsychological thought (notably Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Lacan). In the most general sense, it suggests a type of vision that exceeds and destabilizes traditional scientific, practical, and representational conceptions of vision, along with linear notions of time and space and clear-cut, hierarchical distinctions between subject and object. In this mode of vision, the gaze of the object, however familiar, is experienced by the subject as other and prior, strange and heteronomous. Whether conceptualized in terms of a constitutive lack, split, or loss, this other gaze in turn confronts the subject with a fundamental strangeness within and of the self. (Bratu Hansen 345).

Walter Benjamin has characterized this “ability to look at us in return” as an experience of the aura of the object (ILL 188). The dynamic between the concept of the symptom and Benjamin’s controversial concept of the aura, lies at the core of a visual aesthetics of transgression. Understood in this way, the aura is not an inherent property of persons or objects but is a name of a particular structure of vision in our encounter with images. This notion of investing an object with the ability to return the gaze is a thesis that made such a crucial impact on Didi-Huberman’s theorization of images:

Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationship to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. (ILL 188).



In the footnote to this passage, Benjamin remarks that “this endowment is a wellspring of poetry. Wherever a human being, an animal, or an inanimate object thus endowed by the poet lifts up its eyes, it draws him into the distance” (ILL 200). In *The Arcades Project* he invokes his “definition of the aura as “the aura of distance opened up with the look that awakens in an object perceived” (AP 314).

The most quoted concept of the aura is the one from “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” related to the cult status of the work of art.<sup>43</sup> However, this concept has not been a stable concept throughout his writings. As Miriam Bratu Hansen has explained, it was rather a “productive nodal point” that appeared in various configurations and not always under its own name (Bratu Hansen 339). The idea of the aura originates in the earlier paper “Little history of photography” (1931) in relation to the early portrait photography: “There was an aura about them, a medium that endowed their gaze with fullness and security even as their gaze penetrated the medium itself.” (W 282). In relation to portrait photography, there is a tension in Benjamin’s account of aura: on the one side, the withering of bourgeois conventions of portraiture and its equation with cult status of art, on the other, the capacity to perceive—to apprehend, rather than to recognize—the other’s subjectivity that returns our gaze: “In this respect our relation to works of art functions, structurally, as a place-holder for our

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<sup>43</sup> It is the definition of the aura as a “strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be” (W 23). This distance is the main feature of the cultic image. The technical reproducibility replaced the cult value by the exhibition value, and thus established a new machinery of visibility and proximity. The invention of photography was crucial in this regard because it transformed the status of the work of art, made it approachable and distributable. This was a change of the social function of art, which made obsolete the concepts aligned with cult value of art, such as originality and genius, eternal value and mystery.

relation to other persons. Artworks are the face of the other. Aura marks this spot” (Costello, “Aura” 184).

In the text “On some motifs in Baudelaire” (ILL 155-200), the concept of aura appeared related to the general category of experience and the ethical repercussions of its transformation. Benjamin has argued that the 19<sup>th</sup> century had witnessed a crisis in perception, which was one of bombardment by disconnected images and shock-like stimuli. Drawing from Freud’s view of the consciousness as the “protective shield against stimuli,” he explains how these sense impressions were thus registered, but not really experienced: “the shock is thus cushioned, parried by consciousness” in order to prevent a traumatic effect (ILL 162). “The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions,” he writes, “the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one’s life (*Erlebnis*)” (ILL 163).

Benjamin’s philosophy of image in general has been examined within his philosophy of experience: “Benjamin argued that images should be understood as a technology for organizing experience, and that visual art was a way of speculating upon limits of experience from within it” (Caygill 80). The notion of experience is at the basis of his theory of art and modernity. By the end of the 1930s the degradation of experience was clearly related to the complexity of Benjamin’s attitude to the social and cultural changes of perception in modernity. He has argued that the new technologies of audiovisual production brought about not just the liberation of art from its dependence on cult, but also new forms of perception and sensibility in the new circumstances. As he famously stated:

This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis. (W 37).

Like a surgeon, the cameraman “operatively penetrates into” the material. Benjamin saw the potentiality of new technologies of camera and film to make a surgical cut into the texture of reality. Moreover, and of political importance, the world which opened up to the camera provided knowledge relevant to acting in it: “By its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action” (W 37).

We should recall here also Gilles Deleuze’s theory of affects and percepts that involves a limit-process and posits the self as a threshold, a becoming between two multiplicities (I and the other, the viewer and the image). In a becoming, one term does not only recognize another; rather, each term encounters the other: “Sensory becoming is the action by which something or someone is ceaselessly becoming-other (while continuing to be what they are)” (*What* 177). The affects and percepts as virtual qualities are results of this encounter, which art does not actualize, but makes possible.<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup> Brian Massumi has brought the notion of the Deleuzian “virtual” in relation to Benjamin’s philosophy of “speculative infinity” of possible surfaces or conditions of experience (Massumi 289). Drawing from F.W.J. Schelling, in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze develops a critique that goes beyond Kantian categories of possible experience and beyond the world of appearances, the data of an actualized/perceived reality. As explained by Daniel W. Smith, aesthetics understood as “superior empiricism” implies thinking (with regard to art) about the conditions of the possibilities of *real experience* (Smith 29-56).

“aesthetic mode of thought” as a sensible encounter with an-other is also necessary in facing the contemporary crisis of perception and the atrophy of experience.

The notion of aura as a “productive nodal point” should not be pursued as a return to the cultic or romantic conception of the authentic autonomous work of art and considered an oscillation “between aesthetics and mysticism.”<sup>45</sup> It rather refers to a transformed understanding of images in their relation among each other and their encounter with the viewer, whereby the viewer’s subjectivity (and not only the object perceived) is pushed into the condition of critical questioning, while it “become[s] involved with the sensuous making present of phenomena and situations that alter in an entirely unforeseen manner the subject’s sense of what is real and what is possible” (Seel 100). This differentiates the scope of aesthetic experience, as Martin Seel also defined it, to “allow what is indeterminate in the determinate, what is unrealized in the realized, and what is incomprehensible in the comprehensible to become evident, and it thereby generates consciousness for the openness of presence. It reaches into the heart of presence and at the same time goes beyond all the certainties of the particular self-understanding present” (Seel 105).

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<sup>45</sup> Josef Früchtel, for example, has criticized the Deleuzian philosophy of cinema as such oscillation between aesthetics and mysticism, on the basis that it established the return of the aura of being as the cult value in philosophy, thus shifting “attention from a social theory to an onotology” (143). Früchtel has argued that Benjamin’s essay is a social theory of the decline of the aura through a change in perception induced by society, as well as through a desire of the masses to get closer to things. Such theory is based on what we can understand through Foucault’s concept of *dispositif* as “interlacing of knowledge and power, two key axes of investigation in Foucault’s work that are important for explaining what is going on the third axe, the axe of subjectivity” (146). Benjamin “describes cinema as an apparatus, as a technical-aesthetic medium which influences perception and thus thought and action, in short: the production of subjectivity” (153).

Benjamin has considered the way that new media have transformed art practice and its reception, pressing toward the socialization of art and culture, undermining the significance of exclusive “possession” (Buck-Morss, “Revolutionary I” 69). It is in this sense that he “celebrated” the withering of the “aura.” On the other hand, he believed in the use of technological images in cultural education as a power to vitalize the masses, charging them with a capacity for revolutionary action (69). Adorno considered that such an attempt could amount to manipulating the consciousness of the proletariat and the validation of propaganda, or even the advertising industry. This critique was especially oriented against Benjamin’s essay “The Artwork in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” as stated in letter from 18 March 1936 (“Letters” 120-126). Adorno was skeptical in general about the possibility of attributing specific political functions to art practice. He surely did not believe in the Brechtian program, supported by Benjamin in his address on “The Author as Producer” (1934), of subsuming art to “revolutionary use value” (W 87). According to Adorno’s belief, the aesthetic autonomy of art should not be subsumed under any use value, revolutionary or otherwise. As soon as it becomes involved in concrete social struggles or political revolution, so Adorno, art practice is inclined to turn into propaganda or into commodity. He has argued that the power of art consists in its mere non-reconciliatory existence. To insist on the political use value of art, supported by the belief in the potential of modern technology, was remote from their earlier position, which was based on the belief in the truth-claim of art beyond political or any other form of utilization. That was Adorno’s main argument against Benjamin’s positive valuation of the loss of “aura”: with its aura, art has also lost its truth-claim. However, as Miriam Bratu Hansen has analyzed, aura’s epistemic structure, secularized as “optical unconscious” can also be seen at work in Benjamin’s efforts to re-appropriate the category of experience through the very conditions of its *impossibility* “that would

enable human beings to engage productively, at a collective and sensorial level, with modern forms of self-alienation . . .to reimagine experience under the condition of technologically mediated culture” (338-339).

In her text “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” Susan Buck-Morss has argued that Benjamin expected of art much more than agitation and propaganda, and that is:

to undo the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, to restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity’s self-preservation, and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by passing through them . . . by exploding the constellation of art, politics, and aesthetics into which, by the twentieth century, this tradition [of modernism] has congealed. (5).

## **2.2     *RECOGNIZING THE DIALECTICAL IMAGE***

For both Adorno and Benjamin, the images provided material manifestation of social contradictions, and the historical truth is to be experienced through the materiality of images. In his inaugural lecture to the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt in 1931, Adorno spoke of “historical images” in order to emphasize their socio-historical specificity.<sup>46</sup> At the same time Benjamin was working on his conception,

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<sup>46</sup> In *The Origins of Negative Dialectics. Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*, Susan Buck-Morss explains: “As with Kant, Adorno’s antinomies remained antinomial, but this was due to the limits of reality rather than reason. Non-reconciliatory thinking was compelled by objective conditions: because the contradictions of society could not be banished by means of thought, contradiction could not be banished within thought either . . . In his inaugural lecture Adorno protested against Kant that

for which he coined the term “dialectical image.”<sup>47</sup> The notion of the image in Benjamin’s writing is itself complex and ambiguous.<sup>48</sup> Particularly so in *The Arcades Project* on which he worked from 1927 until his death in 1940. He intended to provide the apparatus for a new mode of historical thinking, which is intimately bound up with his notion of dialectical image. Dialectical image is

a way of seeing, which crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes for their alignment . . . charting philosophical ideas visually within a non-reconciled and transitory field of opposition that can perhaps best be pictured in terms of coordinates of contradictory terms, the “synthesis” of which is not a movement toward resolution, but the point at which their axes intersect. (Buck-Morss, “Dream World” 314).

Georges Didi-Huberman has explained how Benjamin’s notion of dialectical image provides a model that could take contradictions into account:

He was seeking a model that could retain from Hegel the ‘prodigious power of the negative’ and yet reject Hegel’s reconciliation and synthesis of Spirit. With the dialectical image, Benjamin proposed an open, undogmatic--even relatively

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the subject ‘is not ahistorically identical and transcendental, but assumes with history changing and historically revealing forms” (63-83).

<sup>47</sup> Adorno’s “historical” and Benjamin’s “dialectical” images were at the beginning closely related. Susan Buck-Morss has pointed out: “They often combined philosophical subtlety with a certain playfulness, a delight in those double *entendres* and unexpected juxtapositions which were the source of humor in puns, or pictures puzzles like ‘Spot the Object.’ These optical puzzles are called *Vexierbilder* in German, which was how Benjamin described the fragments he published as *Einbahnstrasse* (1928). Adorno used the term in his own writings . . .” (Buck-Morss, *The Origins* 103).

<sup>48</sup> The thinking-in-images is of central significance, and the term ‘image’ (Bild) appears in a whole range of different combinations and contexts, from graphic image (Schriftbild) and dream image (Traumbild) through the images of history (Bilder der Geschichte) and the mnemonic image (Erinnerungsbild), to thought-images (Denkbilder) and dialectical images (dialektische Bilder) (Weigel 20; Ross).

drifting--use of the philosophical dialectic, which he distorted, like other writers and artists of his time: Carl Einstein, Bataille, S.M. Eisenstein, and even, in another register, Mondrian.

First, Benjamin's definition valorizes a *parameter of ambiguity* essential to the structure of any dialectical image: 'Ambiguity,' writes Benjamin, 'is the manifest imaging of dialectic' (AP 10). In this way, he lays claim to certain aesthetic choices (the only authentic image is one that is ambiguous), while at the same time dissociating the dialectical operation from any clear and distinct synthesis, any teleological reconciliation. Second, Benjamin's definition valorizes a *critical parameter*, revealing the dialectical image's enormous potential for intervening in theoretical debates (art, according to Benjamin, goes straight to the heart of problems of cognition). (Didi-Huberman, "The Supposition" 8)

These two parameters—the parameter of ambiguity and the critical parameter—bear an importance for theorizing non-reconciliatory existence and the “principle of nonidentity” that has become the foundation of Adorno's negative dialectics. Susan Buck-Morss has explained that the source of the principle of non-identity was already evident in Adorno's inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt in 1931. He developed his philosophical method, at the time called the “logic of disintegration,” during his intellectual dialogue with Walter Benjamin, which began in 1929 when they formulated a common program at Königstein (Buck-Morss, *The Origin* 63-64).

The point of dispute between Adorno and Benjamin was that for Adorno the principle of non-identity, consequently, should not be validated in relation to any collective subject, not even the revolutionary subject. Benjamin's concept of the



dialectical image, however, acquired its role in a collective revolutionary program as a presentation of a historical object within a charged force-field of the past and the present, in which history appears as a “constellation of danger” (AP [N 7,2] 470). Benjamin was counting on the positive shock producing the political electricity in a “lightning-flash” of truth: “what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation” (AP [N3,1] 463). Critical knowledge of the past aims at situating “the present in a critical condition” in order to contribute to the political “awakening” (AP 5, 588 [N7a, 5], 577 [N2a, 3]):

The Copernican revolution in historical perception is as follows. Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in “what has been,” and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this ground. Now this relation is to be overturned, and what has been is to acquire its dialectical fixation through the synthesis which awakening achieves with the opposing dream images. Politics attains primacy over history. Indeed, historical “facts” become something that just now happened to us, just now struck us: to establish them is the affair of memory. And the awakening is the great exemplar of memory (AP 883).

Benjamin thus expressed the non-reconciliatory existence of the dialectical image through the metaphor of awakening. In the moment of awakening, the past dream that has been compressed and passed over by history, is recognized, and in this recognition the past is redeemed “even in its most wretched state.”<sup>49</sup> The non-reconciliatory

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<sup>49</sup> Benjamin’s idea of redemption was inseparable from the task to “brush history against the grain” (ILL 257). “Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past” (ILL 254).

existence is a “dialectic at a standstill” that brings together the past and the present.<sup>50</sup> The dialectical image, he writes, “is manifest, on each occasion, only to a quite specific epoch—namely, the one in which humanity, rubbing its eyes, recognizes just this particular dream image as such. It is at this moment that the historian takes up, with regard to that image, the task of dream interpretation” (AP [N4,1] 464). In a letter to Adorno from May 31, 1935, he stated that “the utilization of dream-elements in waking state is the textbook example of dialectical thought” (C 662).

He returned to the fragile moment of awakening, a dialectical moment in his eyes because it lies at the evanescent, ambiguous borderline between unconscious imagery and necessary critical lucidity. That is why he conceived of history itself as *Traumdeutung*, ‘dream interpretation’, to be elaborated on the Freudian model. (Didi-Huberman, “The Supposition”8)

Furthermore, just as in Freudian theory, the operation of the dream-images of individuals had as their origin the experiences of an earlier personal history, so the collective images had their origins in prior social history (Buck-Morss, “Revolutionary I” 64). Therefore, Buck-Morss has concluded that “the construction of dialectical images was meant to shock the present collective subject into wakefulness” (64).

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<sup>50</sup> As Susan Buck-Morss pointed out, “Dialectical images, which could not be formed without the past, transformed the way the past was inherited. Revolutionary motivation was thus created by looking backward . . . This is important, because it separates Benjamin’s method from historicism which also interprets the past in the light of the present—but, the given present rather than a revolutionary one . . . The failure to distinguish between the present-as-given from the present-as-revolutionary-possibility robbed historical practice of politics . . . Such history was comfortable and complacent, tempting one to sink into the past as in an armchair. It totally obscured a revolutionary vision of the present as itself the boundary for a radically different future” (“Revolutionary I” 59-60).

Both Benjamin and Didi-Huberman were interested in the psychoanalytic reading of the unconscious and the shock that ungrounds subjectivity. As in psychoanalysis, the origins of subjectivity are always obscured - but the symptoms appear on the surface of the body—so dialectical images appear as the involuntary memory of humanity: “Whereas voluntary memory recalled events in sequential arrangement, the historical space of involuntary memory was ‘disorder’. The image suddenly established itself ‘at a moment of danger’, both for the object and the subject” (Buck-Morss, “Revolutionary II” 78). In that way its elements might enter into a revolutionary constellation with the present. In this way are images to be understood as the archive of collective memory. There lies their political significance. “The construction of memory space is a function of visual art,” states Giordana Bruno in an interview with Marquard Smith, “to imagine and understand a form of production of space that involves a temporal fashion—that is, the very fabric of time—and includes the ruins of the way things work” (Bruno 145). The dialectical image brings together the fragments of a collective memory space in a symptomatic way. It should not be understood as some eternal archetype, but is always related to specific constellations of socially and culturally defined spaces.

### **2.3     *RECONSIDERING AESTHETICS IN THE WORK OF VISUAL CULTURE***

In the last decade of the twentieth century, Benjamin’s dialectics of seeing became an important theoretical background for a “visual turn” that brought forth the issues of attention, perception, experience, and memory, as well as the relation between images, media, bodies, and social realities. “Insofar as we live in a culture whose technological advances abet the production and dissemination of images in a hitherto unimagined level,” Martin Jay has said in an interview with Marquard Smith, “it is necessary to focus

on how they work and what they do, rather than move past them too quickly to the ideas they represent” (183).<sup>51</sup>

In the footsteps of Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin, visual culture is rather a “living methodology” and an “intellectual attitude” than a discipline. In his preface to the volume *Visual Culture Studies*, Marquard Smith has emphasized:

The archival, historical, material, conceptual, and interpretive means . . . shed light on the present in order to further engage contemporary visual culture and its futures . . . It is a living methodology whose very ground is transformed continuously as new political situations, ethical dilemmas, historical documents, conceptual turns, and the new objects, artifacts, media and environments of visual culture, and questions posed of and by visual culture, impress themselves upon our field of vision. (x).

A dialectical concept of visual culture, W. J. T. Mitchell has written in his contribution to the volume *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, cannot rest content with a definition of its object as the “social construction of the visual field, but must insist on exploring the chiasmic reversal of this proposition, the visual construction of the social field” (231-250). Similarly, Hans Belting has called for “a critical iconology” as “an

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<sup>51</sup> The interview is titled “That Visual Turn: the Advent of Visual Culture.” The advent of visual culture in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes after a long period of profound suspicion regarding the hegemony of vision in modern era. Such suspicion is grounded in Guy Debord’s and Michel Foucault’s critiques of the society of spectacle and surveillance, as well as in the social and political implications of the psychological analysis of vision established in Althusser’s reading of Lacan’s theory of subject formation. In his book *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay made an attempt to deal with “the critique of ocularcentrism” and the way this critique has driven the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical French thought. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault has described the new modes of social and political control as institutionalized within a panoptic regime, in which an *unseen seer* surveys a confined and controlled subject.

urgent need, because our society is exposed to the power of the mass media in an unprecedented way” (Belting 303). The lesson learned from Benjamin’s dialectics of seeing is that the structuring of our social experience is determined by the mode of perception affecting the political meanings of the lived environment. The issue is still urgent today in order to address the relation between the lived conditions of highly contested realities and their medialization.

As Irit Rogoff has underlined in her text “Studying visual culture,” the field of vision is not neutral, the encounter with images is not happening in a politically transparent vacuum space but in a space that is always differentiated:

[I]t is always subject to the invisible boundary lines that determine inclusions and exclusions. Most importantly it is always populated with the unrecognized obstacles, which never allow us to actually ‘see’ what is out there beyond what we expect to find. To repopulate space with all of its constitutive obstacles as we learn to recognize them and name them, is to understand how hard we have to strain to see, and how complex is the work of visual culture. (Rogoff 22).

In a manner in which the question *What do Pictures Want?* has been formulated by W. J. T. Mitchell, it has indicated a path toward an interdisciplinary methodology that would reach beyond the question what do they represent. It is evident in the writings of Georges Didi-Huberman, W. J. T. Mitchell, Hans Belting and other researchers in this field, that the “visual” cannot be limited to the strictly visible, and that the concept of image cannot be reduced to the representational model. In W. J. T. Mitchell’s iconology, the term image has been framed by the notions of text and ideology. In Hans Belting’s approach, it has been framed by the notions of medium and body. In his *Bild-Anthropologie*, Belting brings out the thesis that the embodiment of the image happens in the media:

No visible images reach us unmediated. Their visibility rests on their particular mediality, which controls the perception of them and creates the viewer's attention . . . Media use symbolic techniques through which they transmit images and imprint them on the collective memory. The politics of images relies on their mediality, as mediality usually is controlled by institutions and serves the interests of political power. (304-305).

The politics of images thus necessitates a medium. In his book *Transmitting Culture*, Régis Debray has insisted on the term transmission instead of the term communication, because the former “imposes itself on us by its character as process of mediation, something that dispels all illusion of immediacy. Mediology is devoted to medium and median bodies, to everything that acts as milieu or middle ground in the black box of meaning's production, between an input and an output . . .” (7).

In this relation, Hans Belting has also explained the urge, for example, to eliminate certain images in the collective imagination usually results in the destruction of their media: “What the people could no longer see would, it was hoped, no longer live in their imagination. The violence against physical images served to extinguish mental images” (Belting, “Image” 308). In this regard we can recall the attitude towards the images of the socialist past, antifascist struggle, and the principles of Yugoslav Brotherhood and Unity in the times of neo-nationalistic rising of the 1990s.

The use of visual media plays a central role in the interchange between image and body. There are numerous ways for the social and cultural relation to the body as a place of images, whereby the image is placed within social context of the body that carries and keeps a certain image, transforming it into a horizon of meaning. (Bachman-Medick, 341). In his book *Ordnungen der Bilder. Eine Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft*,

Martin Schulz has noted that, due to different orders, discourses and fields of application, the theorization of images should only be envisioned in the plural. In the programmatic setting of this interdisciplinary field, the main principle is how to approach the image, beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries of art history, philosophy, social sciences and humanities.

The overstepping of disciplinary boundaries has often been accompanied by the invocation of the notion of transgression. These invocations, however, differ among each other, depending on the objects of study and the concepts of analysis. The positive notion of transgression as a reversal of hierarchies in the symbolic domains of culture has been drawn from the influential book by Stallybras and White *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, whereby the act of transgressing the rules in one of the symbolic domains—psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order—may have major consequences in any other domain. This positive notion of transgression relates to the breaking the norms of legalized or ritualized behavior in a society, and as such has played an important role in the performative turn within the studies of culture, pointing to the knowledge that operates outside the normative discourses (Bachman-Medick 126-127). In the fields of arts and literature, the idea of transgression has been invoked in its ethnographic and performative aspect, in a sense that the works of art do not solely register the cultural phenomena but they themselves bring about new codes of perception and understanding, as explored in the contributions to the volume *Transgressionen, Literatur als Ethnographie*, edited by Gerhard Neumann and Reiner Warning. The major reorientation was introduced by the conceptualization of the image that breaks out of its confinement as an object and becomes a living presence that is able to look back. The relation between the viewer and the image is no longer that of passive contemplation between the subject and the object, but implies putting in

questions the viewer's subjectivity and problematizing our "will to see" that is also a "responsibility to look" beyond one's own supposed "free position" in front of an image, as discussed by Mark A. Halawa in his contribution to the volume *Maßlose Bilder. Visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression*.

The scope of questions opened up by an encounter with an image includes: the question of fascination, the question of power and powerlessness, the excessive character of the gaze and its culpability for the "will to see," and finally, a "demanding philosophy" that bring us back to the sensible world. This demanding philosophy entails, as Griselda Pollock confirmed, "the aesthetic dimension of the study of visual art within visual culture . . . What if the experience of art is itself precisely that encounter . . . that structures our sense of being human?" ("The Aesthetic" 159). In recent decades, there is an increased interest in aesthetics within interdisciplinary studies of visual culture, philosophy and art history (e.g. Ann Holly and Moxey; Halsall, Jansen and O'Connor).

The emergence of aesthetics as discipline in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the acknowledgment of an idea of thought embedded within the sensible. According to Jacques Rancière, this was a radical change of perspective, which allowed for a "redistribution of the parts supposedly played by the higher and the lower faculties," and this redistribution is also "a matter of configuring the sensible texture of the community" (Rancière, "The Aesthetic" 8). In other words, since community is founded upon the partitioning of the sensible, which determines social positions within it, the aesthetic enterprise provides means for rupturing the sanctioned dispositions to partake of the shared world. For this reason, the question of aesthetics, or rather the aesthetic regime, bears such important relation to Rancière's reconceptualization of the notion of politics. On the other hand, in Terry Eagleton's consideration, the aesthetic enterprise is understood primarily in terms of an ideological enterprise, opening up the



realm of the sensible to the “colonization of reason” (Eagleton 15) and consequently to the insertion of “social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates” (Eagleton 28). Susan Buck-Morss, however, has insisted that what matters is a “sensual, cognitive experience that is capable of resisting abusive power’s self-justification”:

Visual “art” becomes political in this way. It makes apparent what the phantasmagorias of power cover up. Such an aesthetic differs in meaning from aesthetics within modern bourgeois culture and at the same time revives the oldest meaning of the word. (Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld* 101).

The return to the oldest meaning of the word and a thesis of aesthetic dissent as a “demanding philosophy” has received much attention in recent years, most notably as a way to grasp the emancipatory effects of upsetting the social division of sensibility (following Jacques Rancière) or as a way to grasp what Gilles Deleuze has called a *genuine encounter*. In *Difference and Repetition* (1968) Deleuze makes a reference to F.W.J. Schelling’s “superior empiricism” as a philosophy able to conceive the fundamental problem that “instead of a harmonious accord between the faculties, there is a violence that pushes the sensibility to its limits, forcing it to give birth to a thought” (W. Smith 29-56). This violence that breaks the form of a common sense and “perplexes the soul” cannot be reduced to a recognized object. For Deleuze such an encounter involves the short-circuiting of our cognitive and conceptual capacities and bring about different kind of production of subjectivity from the typical. There are two moments involved in that process, “one of dissent (a turn from, or refusal of, the typical) and one of affirmation (of something different) . . . We might call the first parasitical (on an already existing body, for example an institution); the second, germinal (the birth of the new)” (O’Sullivan 197). According to Deleuze, these moments “aren’t to be judged by some final result but by the way they proceed and their power to continue” (Deleuze.

*Negotiations* 146). Art and aesthetics should be mobilized in transversal movements that reconfigure subjective and institutional territories, unsettling the “sedentary structures of representation” (Deleuze, *Difference* 37). These lines of argument have suggested that visual technologies such as cinema and photography can be employed to open up new sites of social, political and aesthetic experience. Thus, “if the aesthetic is on the agenda once again, it is not, as a rule, taken up from the viewpoint of formal or stylistic analysis but under the heading of aesthetic experience” (Siegmond 81).

Didi-Huberman has written that this supposes the understanding of art in its vital urgent function; to see in image the place where it suffers, where the symptoms emerge. As the origins of subjectivity are always obscured, so the symptom appears on the surface of the body, as well as it appears in the surface of the image. Following Didi-Huberman’s theory, this is the moment when images touch the real or “burn” in the contact with the real (Didi-Huberman *Cuando*). To know how to look at an image means to be able to discern a place where its eventual beauty reserves a place for a “secret sign,” a crisis, a symptom that ruptures the equilibrium:

Symptom speaks to us of the infernal scansion, the andyomene movement of the visual in the visible and of presence in representation. It speaks to us of the insistence and return of the singular in the regular, it speaks to us of the fabric that rends itself, of the rupture of equilibrium and of a new equilibrium, an unprecedented equilibrium that soon will break itself again. And what it tells us is untranslatable but interpretable, and interprets itself endlessly. It places us before its visual power as before the emergence of the very process of figurability. It teaches us in this sense – in the brief space of a symptom, then – what figuring is, bearing within itself its own theoretical force. But this is a theory that is active, made flesh, so to speak, a theory whose power happens,

paradoxically, when the unity of forms, their ideal synthesis, breaks apart.

(Didi-Huberman *Confronting* 162).

Theoretical guidelines of a symptom-based visual aesthetics of transgression have their significance not only for a theory of art but also for an ethics of seeing (Costello) and socially valuable potential of aesthetic experience “to compensate for the loss of experience in the modern industrial society” (Jauss qtd. in Siegmund 86), as well as the explosion of visual media and the *anaestheticization* of experience in contemporary world (Buck-Morss “Aesthetics”). The task of art depends on its capacity for revitalizing experience in the times of trauma and crisis, and it is this task that has led to the transformation and widening of the notion of art in the long twentieth century, as well as its educational potentiality..<sup>52</sup>

What Benjamin considered urgent on a collective level—and this urgency is still, no doubt, present in the contemporary world—is to re-appropriate the category of experience, which had been alienated in the process of anaestheticization. There is an ethical stand in seeing images as forms of life in analogy to human encounter as this type of vision is directly opposed to the reduction of life to the status of a commodity, of a quantifiable thing. One has to remember Theodor W. Adorno’s critique of fascism in his *Minima Moralia* as the most extreme intensification of tendencies to reification already latent within the capitalist insistence that anything, human beings included, could in principle be exchange for anything else (40). Following Benjamin, Adorno has remarked in his *Minima Moralia*:

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<sup>52</sup> The transformation and widening of the notion of art was a response to the overall crisis of experience and the experience of crisis. One of the paradigmatic cases was the artistic practice of Joseph Beuys. See Buschkühle “Krisenzeit.” 55-68.

Life has changed into a succession of shocks, interspaced with empty, paralyzed intervals . . . The total obliteration of the war by information, propaganda, commentaries, with camera-men in the first tanks and war reporters dying heroic deaths, the mish-mash of enlightened manipulation of public opinion and oblivious activity: all this is another expression for the withering of experience, the vacuum between men and their fate, in which their real fate lies. It is as if the reified, hardened plaster-cast of events takes the place of events themselves. Men are reduced to walk-on parts in a monster documentary film, which has no spectators, since the least of them has his bit to do on the screen. (54-55)

We can certainly recognize the actuality today of this reduction of life to the “plaster-cast of events” or to a “monster documentary” with no spectators. Although they disagreed on the role of new media, Benjamin and Adorno shared a common project “to redeem aesthetics as a central cognitive discipline, a form of secular revelation” (Buck-Morss, *The Origin* xiii). They have believed that the decaying categories, including the category of the aesthetic, could be “refunctioned” into tools of dialectical materialist cognition. Given the premise of an essentially antagonistic, contradictory reality, they held firmly that knowledge of the present demanded the juxtaposition of contradictory concepts whose mutually negating tension could not be dissolved. What they recognized as the source of horrors was that the bourgeois appeasement of the inner antagonisms of Enlightenment had led to the integration of all oppositional forces into society, which has become total. Together with Bertolt Brecht, they shared the belief that valid art and theory should reveal social contradictions rather than presenting aesthetic resolution of them: “Reality is not everything which is, but everything which is becoming. It’s a process. It proceeds in contradictions. If it is not perceived in its contradictory nature, it is not perceived at all” (qtd. in Haug 153). Although Adorno’s theory has relied on art as

the last factor of resistance against a total society, he has refused to accept the relationship between new technologies, cultural revolt and political action. Benjamin, on the other hand, has argued that the invention of photography was not only the event that transformed the status of art and enabled its politicized usage but had also introduced new forms of perception and sensibility. What matters in rethinking the aesthetic as a critical category beyond the negative notion of “aestheticization” that informed much of postmodernist criticism,<sup>53</sup> is not a direct political efficacy of images or their “agitational” potential, but the reshaping of human sensory capacity and the “effectuation of the world” (Lazzarato 188).

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<sup>53</sup> The warning by Walter Benjamin against the aestheticization of politics and his call for politicization of art concludes his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility”. In “The Author as Producer” (the address originally delivered in April 1934 at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris), Benjamin offers a critique of the photograph’s ability to aestheticize the world. This critique became one of the references of the anti-aesthetic position of critical post-modernism. The positions that Benjamin articulates in these essays, however, should not be taken isolated from the complex of his thoughts on philosophy, history, and art, embedded as they were in the historical demand of the struggle against fascism.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PHOTOGRAPHIC CULTURE AND THE AESTHETIC PROMISE

#### 3.1 *PHOTOGRAPHIC CULTURE: EXPECTATIONS AND DISCONTENTS*

This chapter revisits the main aspects of photographic culture in relation to the issues of visual aesthetics of transgression, to the consideration of the photographic image as medium, as document, and as symptom. Since the inventions of Joseph-Nicéphore and Isadore Niépce, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, William Henry Fox Talbot, and Hyppolyte Bayard, the techniques of photography were almost immediately available in the public domain, and interwoven within the aesthetic discourse.<sup>54</sup> By the end of the 19th century, the expectations regarding the invention of photography have been developing around a belief that the “nature impresses herself by the agency of Light alone” (Talbot qtd. in Emerling 18), and, on the other hand, around the understanding of a photograph as a signature of mental content, “as if you had written out a confession of faith on paper” (Emerson qtd. in Kelsey and Stimson xiv).<sup>55</sup> Embracing the promise of indexicality, “the promise of the material connection between photography and truth,” these expectations point to the invention of photography as a fulfillment of the

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<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey Batchen’s book *Burning with desire* develops Walter Benjamin’s claim from his “Little History of Photography” that photography was “sensed by more than one—by men who strove independently for the same objective” driven by the desire to capture the images in the camera obscura. There was no single inventor of photography, rather there was a widespread social imperative involved within different technical inventions since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and leading toward photography as its fulfillment.

<sup>55</sup> William Henry Fox Talbot’s book *The Pencil of Nature* was originally published in 1844. See Kelsey (15-33). Peter Henri Emerson’s book *Naturalistic Photography for the Students of the Art* was published in 1889. See Nickel (59-75).

Enlightenment idea “to unite the human subject and the world in a process of self-understanding” (Kelsey and Stimson xiv).

The relationship between the photographic image and its referent—the “thing itself”—and the desire to capture it automatically, was a primary aspect of the feverish thinking throughout the contradictory history of photography, whether ridiculed as a “strange abomination” of the “new sun-worshippers” by Charles Baudelaire in 1859 or celebrated as a new form of knowledge by André Bazin in 1958:

The aesthetic quality of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities . . . the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know . . . The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint. (8)

However, as Joel Snyder, among others, has argued, “an image is simply not a property which things naturally possess in addition to possessing size and weight. The image is crafted, not a natural thing” (Snyder 151). The idea of automaticity and truthfulness of a photographic image therefore becomes problematic when taken into consideration certain conventions that govern its meanings, and affirm certain “ways of seeing” as John Berger put it, the procedure of framing and the convention of perspective being among the most obvious. From the outset, the convention of perspective has differentiated the dominant modern worldview from its predecessors, which photography supposedly affirmed.

The modern cultural imaginary has been visually determined by the invention of linear perspective and the camera obscura in the fifteenth century, motivated by a desire to capture the image created within the camera obscura, thus confirming “a transcendental correspondence between the material reality of the world out there with a

fundamental truth or inner necessity that structures that material world” (Kelsey and Stimson xiv). The camera obscura has been synonymous with empiricism and rational observation, as the search for the “true point of view”. As Timothy Mitchell explains, this search is directly related to the word “ideology” as it was originally conceived by Destutt de Tracy in his treatise *Elements d’ideologie*: as a search for the “mirrors in which objects are painted clearly and in their proper perspectives . . . from the true point of view” (de Tracy qtd. in Mitchell *Iconology* 165-166). Ideology is “a theory of imagery,” grounded in the notion of ideas understood as images imprinted on the medium of consciousness. The term “ideology” in this sense was related to the certainty of empirical science, and considered a method for determining which ideas had a true connection with external reality. Karl Marx, however, famously employed the figure of the camera obscura as a polemic device to ridicule the illusions of the idealist philosophy. The debate between idealism and empiricism was thus absorbed in the metaphor of the camera obscura in the 1840s. As a polemic device, the camera obscura was caught between a positive empiricism that “stands outside the historical life process,” and a negative idealism that “can only play with the shadows and phantasms... in a characteristically synthetic and critical move, Marx repudiated both,” Mitchell concludes, and “the third option, then, that avoids the dilemma of the idealist with his shadows, the empiricist with his direct and natural view, is the historical materialist with his sense of both the shadows and the direct vision as historical productions” (175).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s the problem of visuality and ideology was raised with new urgency by a number of theorists and artists coming from semiotic, psychoanalytic and Marxist theories. These critical interventions came as a reaction to photography’s ideological predicament informed by a problematic understanding according to which a photograph could serve as a source of factual knowledge. There



was a need to examine some of the underlying problems of photographic culture, such as the “naturalization of the cultural,” seen by Roland Barthes as a constant characteristic of photographic discourse.<sup>56</sup>

Critical histories of photography have emphasized the heterogeneity not within the medium of photography but within the field of photographic discourse: “the complex social history of the photographic medium” including its “role in public life,” “contradictory relationship to material experience” and “the contradictory goals of photographic practice” (Bolton xi). The influence of Roland Barthes’s work cannot be overestimated in terms of methodology and critical positioning. His early approach to photography demanded an analysis of cultural codes inscribed within the production and reception of photographs. Thus, what constitutes the “photographic field” from the critical perspective is “the collective and multifarious history” of various uses, institutions and discourses (Batchen 5).

The crucial point was that the automatism and indexicality as defining aspects of photographic medium need to be supported by referring to discourses outside photography. Because they are indexical, the photographs acquire meanings only when juxtaposed with “supplemental discourse” (Krauss 59) that renders them readable and intelligible, as Barthes proposed in his texts “The Photographic Message” and “The

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<sup>56</sup> The role of photographic images as part of media, popular culture, and art was a point of critique in Barthes’s early writings. In the preface to the collection *Mythologies*, he writes: “The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality... I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn” (Barthes, *Mythologies* 11). The influential texts “The Photographic Message” and “The Rhetoric of the Image”, written in 1961 and 1964, were published in the collection *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill und Wang, 1977. Later in the text, his late work *Camera Lucida* will be addressed.

Rhetoric of the Image,” analyzing the use of photography in the communicative space of the press and mass culture. The aim of these analyses was to show that there is a heterogeneous complex of codes upon which photography may draw. Each photograph signifies on the basis of a plurality of these codes, the number and type of which varies from one image to another at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture.

Following this problematic, artist and theoretician Victor Burgin wanted to expose the procedure of “placing the viewer” by the photographer who is depicting and framing the scene. In “Looking at Photographs” he discussed how the structure of representation—point of view and framing—is implicated in the reproduction of ideology (“the frame of mind” of “our points of view”), as well as how photographic imagery has a latent content and a manifest text “that may only be read across it symptomatically.” Therefore, any attempt to identify a generic photographic aesthetic based on the specificity of the photographic medium, has been disputed through a critical approach that takes into account the underlying problems of a broader photographic culture and its relation to the general sphere of cultural production:

Photography is one signifying system amongst others in society, which produces the ideological subject in the same movement in which they ‘communicate’ their ostensible ‘contents’. It is therefore important that photography theory takes account of the production of this subject as the complex totality of its determinations are nuanced and constrained in their passage through and across photographs (Burgin 153).

This critical positioning with regard to the complex relations between ideology and image production was articulated along two lines: the critique of the institutions of art and the issue of ideological constitution of subjects. As it turns out, the photography was

key to this “paradigm shift” that favors critical studies of the historical and cultural context of art works and their representation above their formal characteristics and medium specificity.<sup>57</sup> These studies have thus opened up a philosophical “anti-aesthetic” territory, drawing from Walter Benjamin’s two critical essays: “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility” and “The Author as Producer.” The “anti-aesthetic” position has adopted the view of photography as strategic tool to dismantle aesthetics understood as the dominant narrative of modernist formalism, based in medium-specificity, humanist universality and devoid of political questioning.

In this regard, the critical positioning was primarily established as a reaction against the influential photography program of the Museum of Modern Art New York (MoMA). This program was crucial in the recognition of photography as one branch of modernist practice”<sup>58</sup>. Such recognition was based upon the understanding that photography was “a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition” (Galassi qtd. in Emerling 24), the understanding that was shared among the central figures in MoMA’s photography department.<sup>59</sup> This understanding, however, deliberately obliterated any socio-political association in order to ensure its historical continuity and the principle of aesthetic autonomy. For Douglas Crimp, such recognition of photography as modernist practice devoid of socio-political setting from which it necessarily derives, is precisely what demonstrates the crisis of modernity: “postmodernism may be said to be founded in part upon this paradox: that it is photography’s revaluation as a modernist medium that

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<sup>57</sup> On this paradigm shift that centers around photography see *October 5: Photography. A Special Issue*; Burgin; Bolton.

<sup>58</sup> For detailed account on the role of photography within MOMA program see Phillips.

<sup>59</sup> Prior to his appointment as the director of photography department in 1991, Galassi was an associate director since 1981, working with John Szarkowski, who occupied the director’s position at the time.

signals the end of modernism. Postmodernism begins when photography comes to pervert modernism” (Crimp 8).

The MoMA program promoted a twofold version of photographic aesthetics: the humanist universality of meaning inherent in the medium of photography (in the curatorial program of Edward Steichen) and the medium specificity of photography as autonomous artistic practice (culminating in the curatorial program of John Szarkowski, head of the Department of Photography from 1962 to 1991). Steichen’s version characterizes the MoMA exhibitions in the 1950s, promoting the United States as the carrier of universal human values in times of tensions and uncertainties of the Cold War, and in the face of the threat of global nuclear war. The exhibition format plays crucial importance in this process, as it should choreograph the viewer and make an impact similar to the psychology of advertising and social engineering. *The Family of Man* in 1955 was a blockbuster MoMA exhibition comprised entirely of photographs, curated by Edward Steichen, and designed by Paul Rudolph. In an essay “Photography: Witness and Recorder of Humanity,” Steichen says that photography is “the only universal language we have” (Steichen qtd. in Emerling 127). In order to construct this universal family, it was necessary to homogenize the look of the photographs, as well as to make invisible the differences, the violence, and power relations. There is a substantial amount of critical texts about this exhibition that will not be revisited here. Sufficient to recall Roland Barthes’ review:

Everything here, the content and appeal of the pictures, the discourse that justifies them, aims to suppress the determining weight of History: we are held back at the surface of an identity, prevented precisely by sentimentality from penetrating into this ulterior zone of human behavior where historical alienation

introduces some ‘differences’ which we shall here quite simply call ‘injustices’.

(Barthes, *Mythologies* 101)

The program of John Szarkowski, on the other hand, did not follow Steichen’s “casting of photography in the role of social instrument and ‘universal language’”. Instead, he represented an aestheticizing reaction against Steichen’s identification of photography with mass media” (Phillips 34). The exhibition and accompanying writings that Szarkowski produced, *The Photographer’s Eye* (exhibition 1964, publication 1966), has influenced considerably the discourse of photography, particularly the institutionalization of formalist approach that appreciates the technical features of photography as a medium among modernist media. In his *Photographer’s Eye*, 1966, Szarkowsky defined five criteria that were “unique phenomena of photography”: “the thing itself, the detail, the frame, time, and vantage point” (Emerling 25-26). He emphasized the role of Beaumont Newhall, MoMA’s first photography director (appointed in 1940) who constructed an influential technologically driven history based in medium-specific, focusing upon optical, chemical and aesthetic properties.<sup>60</sup> He also started including documentary photographers in his influential early exhibition *Photography 1839-1937*.<sup>61</sup> “The documentary photographer seeks to do more than convey information through his photography: his aim is to persuade and to convince,”

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<sup>60</sup> The culmination of that history was in the works of the group of San Francisco photographers called the Group f.64, founded in 1931 (including Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham and Ansel Adams) that were exhibited in MoMA in the pre-war years with the formalist exhibition model championed by Beaumont Newhall. The name refers to a small aperture setting on a large format camera, which enables great depth of field and the qualities of clearness and definition of the photographic image.

<sup>61</sup> The catalogue was reprinted in 1938 under the title *Photography: A Short History*, and in 1949 turned into a book titled *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present Day*.

writes Newhall (137), and thus “makes use of the artistic faculties to give vivification to fact” (144).

Among the documentary photographers included in the exhibition, it was Walker Evans who will come to occupy a primary place in the history of “straight” photography. He was also the first photographer who held a solo exhibition at MoMA in 1939. Evans’s work, however, presents a contradictory point, as he refused the will “to persuade and to convince,” as well as any “pretension to art.” Evans himself stated: “The thing I’m always talking about (documentary style) shows a purity, a rigor, a simplicity, an immediacy, a clarity which are arrived at through the absence of pretension to art” (Evans qtd. in Emerling 92). In this he found his role-model in the work of Eugène Atget who anonymously constructed the archive of his photographs of Paris until his death in 1927. Responsible for the conservation of the archive and its promotion in New York was Berenice Abbott who got acquainted with his work while participating in surrealist circle in Paris, and collaborating in Man Ray’s studio. She wrote in her introduction to the book *The World of Atget* from 1964: “There was a sudden flash of recognition—the shock of realism unadorned. The subjects were not sensational, but nevertheless shocking in their very familiarity.” (qtd. in Campany, Eugène). Following Atget’s example, Evans considered “straight” documentary as a means rather than an end in itself. Therefore, Evans forwards the kind photography that avoids spectacularization and sentimentalization of its subjects, but rather as a “more impersonal kind of affirmation, a noble reticence, a lucid understatement” (Sontag, *On Photography* 30).

Especially telling was Evans’s project with James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), which was reprinted in 1960, at a time when debates about

photography and documentary practice were reanimated and heated.<sup>62</sup> John Szarkowski played an important role in foregrounding Evans's work as he curated shows such as *New Documents* at MoMA in 1967, criticized both by Susan Sontag and Martha Rosler in her text "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)" in 1989. Rosler reframes documentary's two moments: first, "the immediate, instrumental one, as testimony, evidence arguing for a social practice and its ideological supports," ("the 'art-less' control motives of police record keeping and surveillance") and then, "the conventional aesthetic-historical moment" seducing the viewer into "the organismic pleasure afforded by the aesthetic rightness or well-formedness of the image" (317). The remedy for this situation she finds in a concept of "radical documentary" that neither presents generalized, supposed universal statements on the "human condition" nor creates images that are easily commodified by the gallery-museum system. On the contrary, she posits a practice in which documentary is "incorporated into an explicit analysis of society and at least the beginning of a program for changing it" (271).

Another important representative of radical documentary was Allan Sekula who insisted that photography inevitably carries the complicity with the dominant forms of power and control. Therefore, he embarked on a task to dismantle the rhetoric of modernist "objective" reportage that simplifies social dimensions and in which "camera serves to naturalize the eye of the observer," turning the problems into "reified objects torn from their social origin" (Sekula, "Dismantling" 56). The meaning of photography as historical document was one of the main points of dispute, since, as Allan Sekula

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<sup>62</sup> These debates will lead by the end of the 1970s towards a thorough dismantling of the modernist canon through different strategies. The issues surrounding postmodernist appropriation, and critiques of authorship and aura, are central to Sherrie Levine's daring, seminal deconstructions of the modernist myths of originality in many of her re-fabrication of well-known works by a gallery of male artistic eminences, including her work *After Walker Evans* (1981).

remarks, “when photographs are uncritically presented as historical documents, they are transformed into aesthetic objects” (Sekula, “Reading” 448). What does that mean? It means that the historical understanding depends on the authoritative institution of photography as a mediator of truth, and that such mediation is enabled not by providing the arguments but rather by offering an (“aesthetic,” i.e. depoliticized) experience. He also criticized the notion of photography as universal language with its transparency and the mythologizing of this universality in the exhibitions such as 1955 *The Family of Men* in MoMA, one of the first instances of globalization in the guise of photography exhibition. One can follow a historical trajectory of such practice since the 1851 *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations*, sometimes referred to as the *Crystal Palace* exhibition in reference to the temporary structure in which it was held. “Its exhibitionary order was the . . . laboratory table on which all things and people could be objectively and poignantly compared and contrasted in a uniform and perfect light” (Preziosi 96-98).

Sekula argues that “within bourgeois culture, the photographic project has been identified from the very beginning not only with the dream of a universal language, but also with the establishment of global archives” (“Reading” 446). Is there another way of thinking about photography in terms of a “universal language” as critically oriented against dangers of particularism? In this regard, Sekula turns to the unfinished archival project of August Sander, of which one volume appeared in 1929 titled *The Face of Our Time* (Anlitz der Zeit). Sekula reads Sander’s project in terms of its belief that “socially critical pedagogy might be achieved by the proper use of photographic means.” Sander’s project was “an indirect and somewhat naïve attempt to respond to the racial



particularism of the Nazis, which ‘scientifically’ legitimated genocide and imperialism” (Sekula, “The Traffic” 83, 87).<sup>63</sup>

“The photographer with his camera,” Sander himself stated, “can grasp the physiognomic image of his time” (Sander, qtd. in Emerling 145). This belief associates Sander with European New Objectivity, an approach that was prevalent in the 1930s and the immediate post-war period. This approach was criticized by Brecht and Benjamin on the basis that the camera offers us only a surface appearance of things without capturing the social relations (economic, political). “It translates a complex social system into a two-dimensional picture that alienates and foster enjoyment (visual pleasure) without encouraging any critical faculty of the part of the viewer” (Emerling 32). Emerling points out, however, that Benjamin exempts Sander from his accusation of photographic new objectivity that tends to transform “even abject poverty... into an object of enjoyment” (245). Roland Barthes also famously wrote, alluding to Sander’s photographs, that “photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks” (Barthes, *Camera* 38).

The political dimension of Sander’s project is lost when interpreted in formalist terms without addressing its historical and cultural context (Weimar Germany in the 1920s and 1930s). The same can be said about the contemporary pursuits of “objective photography” such as a project by Bernd and Hilla Becher that should be situated within the context of a particular moment in German history, in relation to the “post-Auschwitz taboo on beauty, and the ideology of anti-ideology that dominated West German cultural

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<sup>63</sup> “When the National Socialist Party came to power in Germany in 1933 they objected to Sander’s project because the “face” of the German people he archived was not Aryan enough. Sander included unemployed, disabled, and supposedly sexually deviant people. Sander’s printing places were destroyed along with the remaining copies of *The Face of Our Time*” (Emerling 146).

politics of the 1950s” (James 50-69). Sarah James in her text “Subject, Object, Mimesis: The Aesthetic World of the Bechers’ Photography” employs Theodor Adorno’s culturally and historically contemporaneous notions in order to explain how their work “embody concretely a form of subjectivity adequate to its objects, and in so doing ‘redeem expression’—which she understands in an Adornian light as a somatic responsiveness to the world prior to discursive thought” (Costelo and Iversen 3). James’s text was included in the collection edited by Diarmuid Costelo and Margaret Iversen under the title *Photography after Conceptual Art*. The collection is important in revisiting the aesthetic issues that conceptual art dismissed as formalism. The political dimension of Bechers’ postwar typologies of industrial structures thus concerns the issue of subjectivity, contrary to the readings that simply characterize their work as preservations, and the seemingly objective and scientific character of their project.

Jae Emerling connects such projects further to the contemporary endeavours such as those of Walid Ra’ad and Akram Zaatari, employing the concept of an atlas to construct a line among different projects from different time periods and cultural contexts: “Hence it is worth noting Benjamin’s discussion of Sander’s project, which he called an *Übungsatlas*, literally an atlas of exercise: ‘Sander’s work is more than a picture book. It is a training manual’ he wrote . . . Perhaps the Bechers’s project is . . . a visual map or geography of contemporary culture? A training manual? An atlas that only art can create” (Emerling 153).

Many commentators make the connection between the Bechers’s use of typology and nineteenth-century archival and typological photographic projects in a variety of contexts, including criminology, medicine, or botany. As Blake Stimson explains, “the term they generally use to describe their method is typological, and they freely state that it has ‘much to do with the 19<sup>th</sup> century’, that is, they say, with ‘the encyclopaedic

approach' used, for example, in botany or zoology or, we might add, various psychophysiological approaches used in medicine and criminology" (Stimson, *Pivot of the world* 146). Stimson reads the Bechers' "seemingly objective and scientific character of their project" as an aesthetic strategy that must be understood in relation to its historical precedents, which is "in part a polemical return to the 'straight' aesthetics and social themes of the 1920s and 1930s," and he acknowledges the characteristics of such aesthetic strategy:

aesthetic charge of their work is always tempered, nuanced, qualified, and guarded. The tension that drives their work is a matter of simultaneously holding onto a commitment and indulging in a visual delight without allowing either the ethical impulse or the desire to get the upper hand. (167)

According to Stimson, Becher's project is a "vision of photography as a medium of sociality," "the manner in which serial photography inscribes a point of view or grammar constitutive of political subjectivity, the manner in which it creates the lived experience of social form" (170). Here it is important to emphasize that Becher's project belongs to the domain of landscape photography that additionally complicates the relation between aesthetics and politics (Mitchell *Landscape*). As Liz Wells explained, the landscape genre, originating in the classic landscape painting, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has been understood also as an opportunity to counteract the visual and social processes of industrialization. The representations of nature in the art movements such as Romanticism and Pictorialism have reflected these changes, without, however, problematizing the concrete impacts of these processes in the particular environments and their relation to the particular ideas about class, gender, race and heritage in relation to property rights, accumulation and control. In the context of ruptures in the 1960s and 1970s, the aesthetics of new topography has generated a new photographic culture, with

the proliferation of local, regional, and international projects.<sup>64</sup> The aim of this new photographic culture was to document the transformation of cultural landscape as a consequence of socio-political processes, postindustrial economy, new infrastructures and urbanism. It has been observed that documentary art practices in Eastern European countries were fulfilling the same task in the period following the 1989 and the total reorganization of reality (Havranek).

In the context of “post-socialist” Yugoslavia, for example, the artists recorded the remnants of the former production-oriented collective infrastructure in the new landscape of consumption and privatization. Slovenian artist Marija Mojca Pungerčar recorded the closed textile factories since the 1990s. The collection of photographs is part of the project titled *Singer* after the name of the well-known sewing machine “Singer” that “first promised, and also made possible, economic independence for women, [and then] has led millions of women all around the world into a future of poorly paid work.”<sup>65</sup> Pungerčar made a research about what these factories meant, and what they still mean, for the people living in their vicinity:

The number of places in Slovenia that are now extinct—places where there once was a thriving textile factory—is far greater than public and media reaction

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<sup>64</sup> In 1975 the exhibition *New Topographics. Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* curated by William Jenkins included: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore and Henry Wessel Jr. This exhibition was second in a series around the idea of the photographic document, initiated by Jenkins with the exhibition *The Extended Document. An Investigation or Information and Evidence in Photographs*, with works of John Baldessari, Thomas Barrow, Michael Bishop, Marcia Resnick, Richard W. Schaeffer, Willaim Wegman.

<sup>65</sup> The project *In Search of Closed Textile Factories* in Slovenia was conducted by Marija Mojca Pungerčar between May and June 2003. Web. 1. Nov 2016.  
<[http://www.3via.org/mojca\\_galerija/index.php?folder=Tekstilne\\_tovarne](http://www.3via.org/mojca_galerija/index.php?folder=Tekstilne_tovarne)>.

might lead us to believe. Standing on the village hillsides, the outskirts of a city, or even, perhaps, in the center of a community, these factories are to varying degrees now forgotten and abandoned—overgrown with grass, occupied by temporary tenants, or sold whole or in pieces to new owners. But there is almost always someone in the vicinity who will tell you the story of ‘their’ factory, of the time when two generations of their family found work there. They will speak of the years when the factory flourished, but also of its painful collapse and today’s unemployment. (Pungerčar n. pag.).

In its very absence, the human element is ingrained in the reminiscences of the once functional infrastructure, the physical remnants of which have become a part of the new cultural landscape. It is most productive to consider this project in terms of the concept of typology; these are typological studies that belong to the symptomatology of post-socialist culture, concretely post-Yugoslav culture. Thus it is not the case of a simple reproduction of reality that does not problematize the inner structure of that reality, such as objectivist practice criticized by Brecht and Benjamin. Rather, it continues the investigative constellation of photographic practices related to conceptualism that revisited the notion of the photographic document supplemented by in-depth research of localities. This period is characterized by a number of conceptual photography-based projects across former Yugoslavia, drawing relations to a broader social context and a new reality.

The critical approaches to photography developing since the 1960s, deriving from conceptual art practices and finding articulation in the discourse of postmodernism, can hardly be overestimated. Only by acknowledging the ideological predicament of the medium of photography and by understanding the complex issues of instrumentalization inherent in the work of representation and modernist aesthetics, can we be able to open

up another perspective that has been gaining prominence in recent decades, and could be designated as the new *aesthetic promise* of photography.

This view was already fostered by Geoffrey Batchen's *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, which attempted at challenging both formalist and postmodern perspectives on photography. More recently Jae Emerling's *Photography: History and Theory* follow up this attempt to demonstrate that the study of photography is "a laboratory for how and why history and theory complicate one another. Another name for this complication is aesthetics" (6). His work is part of the return to aesthetics that began in the 1990s, especially as it relates to an ethics of history, subjectivity and memory. He presents a photographic image as an essential element in rethinking what we mean by the term "aesthetics" as a "multiplicity of strategies, affects, and images of thought" (7). His wager is to approach the issue of art photography as contradictory practice, and to consider an art photograph, following the lessons learned from Georges Didi-Huberman's *Confronting Images*, an "impossible object" (194). "Photography is an event of modernism," writes Emerling in his introduction, and "it is within the discipline of art history that photography has been most intensely and even perversely constructed" (7-8).

The distinction between art photography promoted by the MoMA's department of photography and critical photographic activity that challenged it takes a problematic turn in the 1980s. This is due to the new situation in which critical photographic activity has become integrated within the culture system that was supposed to criticize. As Solomon-Godeau argues, this activity was "critical only within the compass of the art world—the space of exhibition, the market framework, art (or photography) theory and criticism" According to Solomon-Godeau, the institutional triumph of critical photography in the 1980s was "the dubious reward" that led to its "hostage situation" (62).

However, there is another way to think about the expansion of photography in its post-medium condition, elaborated by George Baker: “it is not that modernist medium-specificity simply be dissipated into the pluralist state of anything goes, but rather that such mediums would quite precisely expand, marking out a strategic movement whereby both art and world, or art and the larger cultural field, would stand in a new, formerly unimaginable relations to one another” (136). In this new relation, photography turns into a “way-station” between art and the world, Baker concludes.

The position of photography as a “way-station” where art and the world intersect proves significant with regard to the dramatic socio-political events and wars in the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, which saw the spread of new art practices addressing socio-political realities without abandoning aesthetic consideration, or better yet, finding the aesthetic consideration to be crucial for responding to the contemporary situation. In this situation, recent photographic artists working at the limits between artistic practice and photojournalism call forth new critical attention to the aesthetic issues.

### **3.2     *AT THE LIMIT BETWEEN PHOTOJOURNALISM AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE***

By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the new expectation of socially engaged photography came into prominence: “to transform subjectivity into a new sociality through the work of representation” (Kelsey and Stimson xviii). The photo-documentary movement linked to the international workers’ movement emerged from the Communist International in the late 1920s and carried the promise of a collective construction of the photographic meaning (Ribalta, *The Worker-Photography*). At that time, there was a growing awareness of the central role of images in the construction of

opinions, linked to the expansion of the illustrated press and the rise of photojournalism.<sup>66</sup> Undoubtedly, the occupation of photojournalism is not synonymous with the documentary as a basic mode of photographic culture. Brett Abbott in his text “Engaged Observers in Context” clarified that documentary encompasses a much wider range of outcomes than a photojournalist report that is oriented toward a specific end. However, the distinction is far from clear-cut:

There has been a tendency to speak of photojournalism and documentary as clearly separate forms of photography. The trend to separate the two became pronounced during the 1960s and 1970s as a way of distinguishing what were regarded as more commercial endeavors (dubbed ‘photojournalism’) from those with artistic, or museum, ambitions (dubbed ‘documentary’). (Abbott 10).

The overlap between documentary mode and the “artistic ambition” is still characterized by ambiguous effects and reactions, as Olivier Lugon has remarked in his text “Documentary: Authority and Ambiguities.” Documentary mode within the field of art, and the aesthetic concerns within documentary mode, however, open up a possibility (or a danger) of bringing different ideas about the relation between art and life, aesthetics and politics. What is at stake is the principle of non-interference as the defining principle of documentary, while on the other hand it can be imbued with a much powerful impact if supported by aesthetic strategies.

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<sup>66</sup> For example, the role of Willi Münzenberg and the *Neuer Deutscher Verlag* were fundamental. He started publications such as *AIZ* (*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*) and *Der Arbeiter Fotograf*, the publications contemporaneous with the Soviet magazines such as *Sovetskoe Foto*, *Proletarskoe Foto*, *Nouvyi Lef* among others. Web. 1 Nov. 2016. .<<http://www.foto8.com/live/worker-photography-movement/>>.



In his influential essay “Since realism there was...,” published in the catalogue *Art and Ideology* for the exhibition at New Museum of Contemporary Art (NYC) in 1984, Benjamin Buchloh discussed the conditions of contemporary art with regard to the function of documentary within Soviet avant-garde, where it has been put to into service of social and cultural revolution. The photographic document has been seen as the main instrument of persuasion, related to the debates on the social function of artists as educators of the people in the revolutionary society, in the search for an epistemological and perceptive rupture through images that aspired to the construction of a new viewer.<sup>67</sup> Of particular importance were the strategies of photomontage and cinematographic montage in order to bring forward the simultaneity of diverse points of view, and to point to the tension between the diverse elements, the impossibility of reducing complexity to a single point of view. There was a strong belief in visual education, following the famous dictum of Moholy-Nagy that the illiterate of the future would be those who did not know how to use a camera.<sup>68</sup> Walter Benjamin cited this dictum in his “Little History of Photography,” and subsequently praised the function of photography and cinema as means of education and revolutionary change.

Benjamin Buchloh’s texts since the 1980s describe how the European avant-garde served as a framework for the institutional establishment of the avant-garde in the United States. The first director of New York Museum of Modern Art in New York, Alfred Barr, traveled to Paris, Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union for a few years prior to

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<sup>67</sup> Soviet factography and productivism were immersed in the printed media, promoting photographic education, and self-representation of the workers as a form of appropriation of the means of production. Sergei Tretiakov, the theoretician of factography, promoted extended social photo-observation. See: *October 118* (Fall 2006) *Special Issue on Soviet Factography*.

<sup>68</sup> Moholy-Nagy positions photography as an instrument for generating “new vision” that fosters “not the aesthetic of tradition, but the ideal instrument of expression, the self-sufficient vehicle for education” (347-8).

the museum's establishment in 1928 to explore current avant-garde productions across Europe. However, Barr was more interested in the western European model, primarily in Paris, than in the new aesthetics correlative to the introduction of industrialization and social engineering of the Soviet Union after the revolution. He was dismayed to learn that Russian artists were turning away from painting and dedicating themselves to the art of propaganda, but also to the experiments in exhibition and spatial design with the goal to create collective experience rather than aiming at individual aesthetic contemplation.<sup>69</sup>

In parallel with this process of spreading European avant-garde models, the photo-documentary movement spread across Europe and reached the United States and was organized in the Photo League, which was founded in 1936. Its objective was the promotion of documentary photography dedicated to social problems, and oriented toward a politics of reform and social education.

From the outset, social documentary has never been detached from the aesthetic considerations (considering, for example, the photo-essay books by James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1941 and Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *Have You Seen Their Faces* in 1937) (e.g. Carter). It is useful to revisit the cultural history of the US social documentary with a particular focus on the FSA (Farm Security Administration) project and the integration of social documentary within art institution such as Museum of Contemporary Art (MoMA) New York. As part of the New Deal recovery project, the FSA collected photographic images of the nation's

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<sup>69</sup> It was precisely this collective aspect and the instrumental use of photography that El Lissitzky inserted into his exhibition designs and display techniques that will be appropriated for the MoMA propaganda exhibitions in the 1950s curated by Edward Steichen. The immediate precedent of *The Family of Man* was the exhibition *The Road to Victory* in 1942 that used blown-up documentary military photography in order to celebrate the greatness of American nation. The exhibition was designed by Herbert Bayer. On photographic propaganda exhibitions see Ribalta.

agricultural conditions. The rise of social documentary in the 1930s was a response to the socio-economic crisis and subsequent efforts to recover the devastated economy and culture, given that

newly developed media and their special kinds of appeal helped reinforce a social order rapidly disintegrating under economic and social pressure that were too great to endure, and helped create an environment in which the sharing of common experience, be they of hunger, dustbowls, or war, made the uniform demand for action and reform more striking and urgent. (Susman 193).

While newspaper articles might have given the fabricated information, documentary photographs seemed to provide incontestable facts. As documentary historian Liz Wells has put it, people in the thirties believed that “[photography] imposes rather than creating meaning; it disempowers the reader or spectator from any acts of interpretation vis-à-vis the text” (Wells, *Photography* 78). This means that the promise of photography to deliver uncorrupted reality was revived through the immediacy and transparency of documentary gaze. The critic and historian John Tagg, however, has argued that these images belong to “the power of the apparatuses of the local state which deploy it and guarantee the authority of the images it constructs (Tagg, *The Burden* 64). Thus, the images helped “quickly and cheaply record and identify” society’s potential threats (63). In his investigation. Tagg has focused particularly on the above mentioned initiatives of the Farm Security Administration (FSA). His conclusion was that the photographs have their ‘currency’, and that this currency is measured by signifying values guaranteed by the authority. The ‘New Deal’ documentary in the United States was a case of what Tagg has named “the rhetoric of recruitment” (Tagg, *The Disciplinary* 51-94).

In the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first documentary mode has become again one of the most significant tendencies within contemporary artistic practice that reinvent traditional documentary photography and film, and attest to a new diversity and complexity including photographic and video essays. Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind have written in the Introduction to the book *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*:

The double bind is strong: on the one hand documentary images are more powerful than ever. On the other hand, we have less and less trust in documentary representations. This is the case at a time when documentary visual material is a part of contemporary affective economies, supporting everything from humanitarian aid to a sustained politics of fear. Without it something like globalized media would look entirely different, and the course of events in, for example, world politics would be completely different (11).

There is thus an interplay between the “advanced media literacy” and the “habitual distrust” in the propaganda machinery, in which documentary modes are caught up. However, it is precisely the awareness of the lack of certainty and the refusal to appease the issues of contradictory reality, which ultimately attest to the symptoms of contemporaneity. At the same time, this ambiguity, investigated in its productive effects, has actually contributed to the reinvention of documentary practices.

Before arriving at that point, it is particularly telling to consider the conflation of photojournalism and art photography with regard to the most debated dilemmas such as the “aestheticization” of human misery, natural disasters and wars. The intersection between aesthetic interests and social engagement was crucial in the works by the Magnum Agency, which originated from the need to establish the profession of a

photographer—at first a war photographer, and soon after as witness of any disaster. Magnum Agency (an independent documentary photographers cooperative) was established by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, David Seymour, George Rodger in 1947. Cartier-Bresson called the famous agency “a community of thought, a shared human quality, a curiosity and a respect for what is going on in the world, and a desire to transcribe it visually” (qtd. in Abbott 13).

Their work among other provoked also what Mark Reinhardt called “critical anxiety” with regard to the relation between aesthetic and documentary dedicated to picturing the scenes of suffering. In 2006, Reinhardt programmed an influential exhibition *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain* at the Williams College Museum of Art (UK) with art historian Erina Duganne and Holly Edwards. The catalogue included insightful essays by museum’s senior curator John Stomberg and theorist Mieke Bal, that address new critical perspective to foster “a more reflective awareness of how we represent and address the rampant suffering and the corollary spectatorships that characterize our time”. In his article “Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the Anxiety of Critique” Reinhardt argued that “critical anxiety” might be based on a misunderstanding of the concept of aesthetics as “unproductive, pernicious response to the world’s calamities and injustice” (21) with the exclusive attention to the work’s formal or internal properties, “which cover only part of the whole aesthetic concepts” (23).

The problem is how to overcome the critical anxiety without abandoning the aesthetic promise. A new direction of photographic practices in recent decades has been labeled “post-documentary” on the grounds that it tends to overturn previous documentary principles of photographic non-intervention and authenticity. It is also the case that these projects deal with the aftermath of events rather than “being caught up in

the chaotic midst of an event” (Cotton), relying on often brutal immediacy of images of suffering. This “late photography” is “not the trace of an event, but the trace of the trace of an event” (Campany) and it is often more empathetic, discursive and visually appealing than conventional war reportages.

Photographs of this type [images of suffering] confront us throughout the mass media in forms as varied as photojournalism (newspapers have printed photos since the 1880s), advertising (consider the infamous Benetton ads of the 1990s), and art... [W]hat is at stake when photography is used to capture and transmit the suffering and even death of others to viewers far removed from the given scenes of violence? What is the nature and function of this document if it is more than an act of rendering suffering and pain into an aesthetic, contemplative image to be consumed? (Emerling 85-86).

The debates about documentary and aesthetics have been continuously reanimated, especially since the proliferation of images of suffering in the media in the last decades. The artists are developing new strategies to counteract the anaestheticization as a consequence of such media saturation. They are trying to capture the ambivalences rather than to offer a direct visual information. Amongst these strategies are, for example: “the fossilized vision” of Sophie Ristelhueber’s project *Iraq* in 2001; “listening with the eyes” in Zarina Bhimji’s project about Uganda *Memories were trapped inside the asphalt* (1998-2003); Anthony Haughey’s registration of ambiguous markings in the landscapes in his project *Disputed Territory* set in Ireland, Bosnia and Kosovo (since 1999); desolated landscapes of Paul Seawright and Simon Norfolk reminiscent of late-18th century landscape painting. They are also insisting of the affective charge of their images, even when it contradicts the repertorial accuracy: for example, Susan Meiselas’s electrifying use of color in her project about Nicaragua; evocative non-spectacular

depictions of war and violence in Richard Mosse's projects about conflicts in Haiti, Baghdad, and Beirut; the "gravitas and monumental scale" of panoramic images of Luc Delahaye's *History* series that resolve around military conflict and include images taken in war zones, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, and others showing the consequences of war, such as the trial of former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević in The Hague in 2002. Particularly important is the strategy of staging, or the confusion between the facts and the fiction: paradigmatic cases are Aernout Mik's staged-documentary that strategically paraphrases photojournalism's conventional mise-en-scene and Walid Raad's fabricated documentary archive (the Atlas Group), which invites viewers into a rupture between journalism and history.<sup>70</sup>

The artists working at the limits between photojournalism and artistic practice rely on their journalistic backgrounds. For example, Luc Delahaye is a former Magnum photographer and has been affiliated with various media-institutions such as the SIPA agency and Newsweek, covering wars in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Chechenya, and Bosnia.<sup>71</sup> Even for those without distinctive journalistic careers, journalistic conventions play a significant role in their works. However, "post-documentaries" emphasize the juxtaposition of facts and fiction, and ambiguous or ambivalent narratives, as a way to resist both mass-media clichés and journalistic conventions. They offer,

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<sup>70</sup> About these different strategies see, for example: Emerling's chapters "Documentary, or instants of truth" (82-119), "The archive as producer" (120-163), and Cotton's chapter "Moments in history" (167-190).

<sup>71</sup> Among the photographers who documented the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina were also Alexandra Boulat, Patrick Chauvel, Enrico Dagnino, Luc Delahaye, Ron Haviv, Enric Marti, Christopher Morris, Klavdij Sluban, Laurent Van Der Stockt. In the period December 18, 2009 – January 15, 2010, their collective exhibition, together with the photographers from Bosnia-Herzegovina Zijah Gafić, Milomir Kovačević, Damir Šagolj, Tarik Samarah and Trio Group, was organized by French Cultural Centre *André Malraux* in Sarajevo and Paris gallery Agnes B. on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this Centre, that had important role in the post-war cultural revitalization of the city.

through their aesthetic strategies, not the experience of visual shock but rather the opening of a process of non-reconciliatory thinking that reveals and simultaneously passes beyond what Susan Sontag in her books *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others* accused as a kind of “tourism,” exoticism or familiarization of the other’s pain.

In opinion of Martha Rosler, the overturning of documentary principles through the aesthetic strategies, however, carries a dangerous threat because this “poetic reception of facts” may promote “an escape” from “reportorial responsibility and accuracy” (Rosler, “Post-documentary” 211, 240). Rosler has, for example criticized Susan Meiselas’s use of color film in her Nicaragua project. In a review of Meiselas’s project, Rosler warned of “the dangers of conflating art and journalism” and she viewed the use of color as “incompatible with depictions of atrocity and as catering to sensation, exoticism, and commercial interests” (Rosler, “Post-documentary” 245-58). According to Brett Abbott and Jae Emerling, the use of color is a conscious decision “not simply to make the images electrifying, but because she felt it better captured and conveyed the spirit of the revolution as she experienced it” (Abbott 25).

With regard to these strategies that open up new ways of doing documentary, I would like to address the work of a “post-documentary” photographer from Bosnia-Herzegovina, dedicated to registering the disasters of war and post-war situation, at the limits between photojournalism and artistic practice. The images made in the aftermath of war are often charged with high level of contradiction between the return to ordinary life and the remnants of the recent violent past. Ziyah Gafić is a photographer who started searching for those contradictions in the landscapes of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and then exploring the consequences of conflict in Pakistan, Palestine and Israel, to Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Chechnya and Lebanon, translating what he saw into the methodical compositions within which every detail has a purposeful position,



“electrified” by the intensity of color. The project is titled *Stories from Troubled Societies*. One photograph titled *Quest for Identification* [Figure 19] pictures the skeletons laid for identification on white sheets behind a mosque, following the organization of the excavation of the bodies of massacred Muslim villagers in 1992. There is a dissonance between the skeletons and the beautiful view across the landscape, with the fence in between, upon which someone hung up the carpets to dry after manual cleaning. The ordinariness of the springtime action of manually cleaning the carpets in Bosnia-Herzegovina collides with a horrifying fact that the procedure of cleaning the skeletons and preparing them for identification is becoming ordinary in the post-war situation.

*The Quest for Identification* has more recently turned into a new project, this time dedicated to the objects that are being used as forensic evidence in the ongoing process of identifying the victims and in the trials for war crimes [Figure 20]. These are personal belongings recovered from mass graves, the simple ordinary items now photographed in a way that endows them with potentiality to transmit the last instances of someone’s existence before execution. The items cannot be reduced to their functionality, as Leora Auslander has emphasized, they are also memory cues and by that “human experiences are ‘housed’ in things,” they are also “sites of aesthetic investment” in terms of their embodiment and mortality. (Auslander 1016). Because of this special relation to human body and psyche, things have special importance in the process of working through the aftermath of genocide. The forensic approach, the objects photographed in the same frontal style on the steel mortuary table, provides a necessary detachment in order to be able to process the information sent by these objects, “very similar to Proust’s madeleine,” said the photographer, quoted by Paul Lowe (228) in his contribution to the volume *The Violence of the Image. Photography and International Conflict*. The thesis

in this text is about “The Forensic Turn: Bearing Witness and the ‘Thingness’ of the Photograph.”

For Gafić, the importance of the project was that “there was a chance that someone might recognize the items as belonging to a lost loved one [and] . . . for someone in that situation it is potentially mentally easier to browse through a book than to have to go to a morgue and look the items themselves” (Lowe 227). Looked one after the other in a photo-book, they form what Jill Bennett referred to as “a kind of visual language of trauma,” which is transactive rather than communicative, it “touches us, but does not necessarily communicate the ‘secret’ of personal experience.” In the following, the relation between trauma theory and the theory of photography will be addressed in more detail in order to arrive at an understanding of the aesthetic promise of photography within post-traumatic culture.

### **3.3 TRAUMA THEORY AND THEORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

As addressed in Chapter Two, Georges Didi-Huberman follows Walter Benjamin’s commitment to “the unconscious of the visible,” finding the proximity, from an epistemic point of view, between art history and psychoanalysis (*Confronting* 28, 29). In finding this proximity between art history and psychoanalysis, Didi-Huberman insists that this affinity concerns “the putting in play of a critical paradigm—and absolutely not the putting in play of a clinical paradigm” (7). He employs the psychoanalytic notion of the symptom in order to point to the crisis of representational model of art historical analysis, in which there is supposed to exist a direct reference between what we see and what we know. A symptom is:

an incision in the “normal” regime of the visual world, a regime wherein we think we know what we are seeing. . . . Here indeed is a central question for the history of art: a question that brings it close, from an epistemic point of view—and far from any “psychology of art”—to psychoanalysis. (29)

The incompatibility between seeing and knowing as a challenge for the conventional understanding is most strongly evident in the phenomenon of trauma that “suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing . . . may occur as an absolute inability to know it” (Caruth, *Traumatic* 208). The assumption that seeing could be immediately translated into knowing characterizes the clinical paradigm that Didi-Huberman criticized, more specifically in relation to the expectations of Jean-Martin Charcot to “arrest the confounding dialectics of the symptoms” and to explain the enigma of hysteria by way of images. In order to do so, Charcot systematically employed the medium of photography and created his photographic collection, which he called his “Museum of Living Pathology.” As explained by Ulrich Baer, Charcot treated the medium of photography as a tool to mechanically frame the reality that otherwise eludes both the patient and the diagnostician, and he believed that specific aesthetic conventions may facilitate such framing:

Like phosphorescent specimens pinned in velvet boxes, Charcot’s women float in the soft darkness of early photography . . . . With the camera he fashioned a mechanical framing of reality in an attempt to generate a sense of place for those who were violently unmoored from their own experience . . . . Charcot employed the conventions of late-Romantic painting to portray his hysterical patients as hieroglyphs to be deciphered in the search for the truth of an enigmatic memory disorder. A successful diagnosis entailed visually pinning the figure, with the help of the flash, against the background of her

surroundings. This technically achieved differentiation of figure and ground, without which no vision is possible, aimed at the heart of a disease resulting from the traumatized patient's inability to distinguish properly between herself and the world. (Baer 16-18).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, it was precisely this photography-based clinical investigation at the Salpêtrière that made Freud weary of photographic evidence in service of a taxonomic organization of symptoms, and led him to distance himself from his teacher and to develop his own theory of overdetermined and unpredictable symptoms. In his early writings Freud used the metaphor of the camera to explain the unconscious as the place where bits of memory are stored until they are developed—"like negatives that harbor an image until they are printed and emerge from the developing vats" (Baer 10). This metaphor was in line with the early theoretical model of trauma developed in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that explained how traumatic events "exert their troubling grip on memory and on the imagination because they were not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence" (Baer 8). Dissatisfied with clinical experiments involving the photographic "evidence," Freud later disavowed the metaphor of the camera, and centered his practice of the psychoanalytic dialogue around the speaking subject, whose verbal expressions bear witness to the "unintentional testimony," later to be transformed, in the process of talking-cure, into the conscious testimony. However, as Ulrich Baer insists, Freud's disavowal of photographic model

begs the question of the link between photography and trauma, rather than settles it . . . The uncanny impression of photography that a slice of the past has been shuttled into the present is analogous to the phenomenon of traumatic hysteria, in which past experiences seem to bypass processes of mental screening and attain their full meaning only later. (43).

In his book on the photography of trauma Baer defines this uncanny impression as “spectral evidence” that corresponds to the aspects of experience that “remains alien even to those who cannot forget it” (139). Photography, he attests, can provide special access to those experiences that have remained unremembered yet cannot be forgotten. He follows here Roland Barthes’ late theory in *Camera Lucida* that a photograph “mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” and Benjamin’s analysis of two temporalities cohabiting the same photograph “of that long-past minute where the future is nesting, even today”:

We recall the same coincidence of two distinct temporalities in hysteria; yet in its psychoanalytic interpretation, the hysterical symptom pointed not to an impending future but a past that is yet to be remembered. Just as a traumatic event is only rarely reintegrated into memory, the photographic presentation of an event never achieves the status of full presence. (53).

The spectrality of the symptom cannot be reduced to the representational model because it compels us to apprehend something that is registered in the psyche without being integrated into the larger context of consciousness. By the same token, the photographic spectral evidence is something that might escape the politically charged strictly contextual readings of the photographs, since it points to something that was never integrated into the context. Yet this should not lead us to “an irrational dismissal of reality, or a thoughtless celebration of its heightened return in trauma,” Baer concludes. Following Cathy Caruth, trauma “forces us to rethink our notions of experience . . . To be traumatized is precisely “to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished” (Caruth, “Introduction” 4-5). Baer thus proposes to think through the model

of trauma as “reality imprint” while acknowledging that this is a theoretical model that helps us grasp how a particular photographic image can show a scene that becomes meaningful only in and as its representation” (12).

It is, however, a specific kind of representation, one that can “give viewers access to an event that they, like those whose destruction was its aim, might otherwise find impossible to fully apprehend” (18). He gives an example of a landscape photograph by Dirk Reinartz which appears in his 1995 collection, *Deathly Stills: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps*. His argument is that this photograph represents an “unexperienced experience of a death” without permitting the viewers to “posthumously appropriate it through empathic identification or voyeurism”:

They contain no evidence of the site’s historical uses, and they rely explicitly on the aesthetic tradition of landscape art and, as I will explain, on the auratic “experience of place” to commemorate the destruction of experience and memory . . . (66)

Instead of showing the typical markers of Holocaust sites, the image refers to the event through its titles and accompanying texts. Baer names this procedure “the framing of an absence” (18). Similarly, Griselda Pollock cites Buci-Glucksmann’s notion of “an image of absence” (Pollock 866) in reference to the work of Israeli/French artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger.<sup>72</sup> Ettinger deals with the potentiality of the artistic image to transmit the trauma, in a way that the original document of the Holocaust is reworked to become a “fragile trace of a past with which we can never fully reconnect” as stated

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<sup>72</sup> In 1992 Bracha Ettinger began this series, framed by the mythic figure of Eurydice. Like many of her works there is a recurring encounter with one image of a frieze of naked woman about to be shot, from an unidentified photograph of mass murder by Einsatzgruppen Aktionen in Mizroc in the Ukraine in 1940.

by the artist in her text “Art as the Transport-Station of Trauma.” What is important in this process is to arrive at an apprehension that such un-forgetting is shared by those who suffered it and by those who are trying to reconnect to the past.

Why this emphasis on the absence with regard to the trauma-related art works? Pollock explains that there is a danger inherent in trying to recapture the suffering endured in the past and saved as an image. The victim are in this way suspended between two deaths: their inhuman death and “the metaphorical killing by the Orphic gaze, the looking back that kills a second time which always awaits them once their suffering was capture, voyeuristically, by a photograph that may be exposed over and over again” (857). There is a danger of reducing their humanity to an image through the photographic recording of their dying, like in Charcot’s photographs the patients were captured as mechanical dolls or immobile corps. “So how can looking back not kill?” asks Griselda Pollock. “How can we meet Eurydice, but not with Orpheus’s deadly retrospect?” (857). She refers, for example, to Bracha Ettinger’s procedure of working with the photographic archive of atrocity to create her series called *Eurydices*:

The found image is firstly reworked by being passed through the blind, light-reading, electro-magnetic reconfiguration performed by the photocopy machine . . . As a recreated material trace it functions more like one end of a string, stretching between two points, between then and now, opening the space not only between past and present, but also between past and future. (856).

Griselda Pollock, with Bracha Ettinger, considers this “string” to be the effect of the aesthetic encounter “of bits and pieces of many subjects, past and present, known and unknown” (859). In order for such encounter to occur it is necessary to dedicate oneself

to a specific kind of work with images, which Ettingers calls *artworking*, in resonance with Freud's dream work, or work of mourning, or working through.

The encounter may not happen for every viewer. No one can predict the outcome of the encounter. Nothing may resonate for any viewers on this occasion . . . But the invitation is there to make one's own borders fragile enough to register the being, pain or *jouissance* of the other and not to attempt to master it as an object or a communication. Art can thus create an occasion for the emergence into aesthetic encounter of aspects of our subjectivities that are open to responding to the other we do not know and receiving and processing aspects of the trauma, including death, of the other. (859-860).

This mode of understanding requires a radical expansion of subjectivity itself, a "co-emergence in difference" as borderspace. This is not a space of the sublime as a desubjectifying, unimaginable otherness and it does not refer to the encounter with an image that blinds, a shielded access to what, without the artifact, frightens us to death, as Lacan described the figure of Antigona. It is rather a glimpse of another economy, a connectivity between the dead and the living.

The aesthetic procedure that enables such liminal encounter is implemented in the cycle of photographs dedicated to the life of the survivors and the exhumation of bodies from the mass graves in Eastern Bosnia, systematically executed and buried at the very end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, on July 11, 1995, in the area of Srebrenica, at that time under the protection of the U.N. forces (See Chapter Four). The photographer Tarik Samarah uses his technical skills to bring forth the boundless photographic possibilities in between black and white, all the nuances of the landscape of grey, which in these photographs acquires such materiality of the grainy texture that almost invites the viewer



to touch it. This impossible invitation makes us at the same time drawn into the image and suspended at its threshold. The same dynamic characterizes the depicted scenes, which offer an insight into the emptied lifeless landscape of crime, without any sentimental cliché that could make this emptiness easier to absorb, without permitting, as Baer said, the posthumous appropriation. What we are “forced” to look at, and consequently to enter into a process that Griselda Pollock with Bracha Ettinger calls “aesthetic wit(h)nessing.” For those who accept the invitation, it means an anticipation of traumatic unforgetting, as the photographs depict the aftermath, not the event itself.

One of the photographs shows two hands touching each other, one in a forensic glove—the hand of Ewa Klonowska, a forensic who dedicated many years to the exhumation of victims in Bosnia—and the other hand of an unknown victim excavated from the mass grave [Figure 21]. The scene itself could be a horrific testament of atrocity or simply a documentation of a moment in the forensic process, yet the subtlety through which it is depicted and then enlarged in the photograph makes it a timeless image of relatedness “beyond the grave,” of “yearning for connection that even defies the absoluteness of death” (Pollock 867).

To consider a theoretical model of trauma as “reality-imprint” and “aesthetic wit(h)nessing” as encounter of many subjectivities, past and present, may enable the investigation into the “larger, more profound, less definable crisis of truth which, in proceeding from contemporary trauma, has brought the discourse of the testimony to the fore of the contemporary cultural narrative” (Felman 17). Such investigation extends beyond the routine testimonial trope in legal context or related to the individual suffering, and reaches towards the understanding of historical experience. It is important to emphasize that this move should not rely upon the neglect of the empirical

phenomenon of trauma and the experience of actual people.<sup>73</sup> What it does imply is that the “peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience” has an affinity with traumatic experience. This historical conception of trauma can also be understood as conveying the urgent centrality for psychoanalytic thinking of the relation between crisis and survival. Freud’s difficult thought provides a deeply disturbing insight into the enigmatic relation between trauma and survival: “the fact that, for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that it is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, can be a crisis” (Caruth, “Introduction” 9).

The death drive theory has also been applied in the suggestion that modernism was driven by the fascination with the world convulsed, suspended, what has been denominated as a fascination with “the fixed-explosive,” the violent arrest of the vital, the sudden suspension of the animate. The photograph thus came to be understood as an uncanny fore-image of death. Photography points to the logic of the death drive in two ways: in its arresting shock and in its tense (the future anterior of the photograph: this will have been). Barthes has argued that the paradox of photography, lies in that, instead of capturing the living, it rather confirms the fact of death. Photographs, therefore, do not provide a direct analogy between an image and a referent; rather, they testify to the reality of that which has died or is going to die. In the section of *Camera Obscura* about

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73 In their critique “Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma”, Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weinböck warn against such tendency of neglecting the empirical research, as well as against the tendency to insist categorically that for conceptual reasons trauma “must remain inaccessible to memory” and cultural representation. They rightly point out that “the results of clinical research . . . has shown consistently that integrating traumatic experiences within narrative frameworks is an indispensable tool of psychotherapy and that narrative forms of representation help groups and collective entities to come to terms with events of violence and its mental and social consequences (233).

the Winter Garden Photograph of his mother, Barthes recounts this finding in terms of a double loss: “I was then losing her twice over, in her final fatigue and in her first photograph, for me the last; but it was also at this moment that everything turned around and I discovered her as into herself” (71). This is a process in which what is lost is found again only to be lost again: “I shudder... over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe” (96).

With this in mind I would like to address the series titled *Kino Crvena Zvezda* (*Red Star Cinema*, 1993-2011) by Silvestar Kolbas, Croatian photographer, cameraman, film director and educator. The cinema hall Red Star in his hometown Vinkovci was burned to the ground during the shelling attacks at the beginning of the 1990s during the war in former Yugoslavia. In the ruins of the building, Kolbas found leftovers of unknown film tapes and later produced enlarged series of photo-grams out of the details on the tape. One piece of the film contained a black and white picture of the old bridge across the river Neretva in the city of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, built in the sixteenth century and demolished on November 9th, 1993. The bridge is a prominent architectural element in the landscape of Bosnia-Herzegovina, featured also in literature, photography and painting, wherein it functions as a symbol of community, the Mostar bridge being a paradigmatic case, pictured in countless versions throughout the centuries. The moment of destruction of the Mostar bridge was experienced as a shock on the collective level. The act of enlarging dirty and contaminated film photo-grams more than a decade later corresponded to the artist’s own psychological experience of a shattered reality embodied in the destruction of the bridge. The treatment of the photogram as a photograph, the reading of the cinematographic film from the evidence of the frame enlargement, takes the frame as an immobile instant to be reanimated through the agency of an abstract time, the reliving of trauma.

Here we are also encountered by a process described by Barthes, in which what is lost is found again only to be lost again. However, instead of embracing “the thanatographic and principally melancholic perspective,” we should, as Ulrich Baer has insisted, follow what Edgar Morin has described as all photographs’ capacity to serve as “the rearguard of memory [that] struggle[s] against time, [to] defend their shreds of living presence against oblivion, against death” (qtd. in Baer 129).

The series and the repetition of the motives resonates around “the suggestive, not indexical, links to pathos, to trauma, history, compassion” (Pollock 867). The trauma is repeated suffering of the event that eludes the knowing of what has first constituted it. And by carrying that impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself, “trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of impossibility” (Caruth 10). The affinity between photography and trauma is in this paradoxical cohabitation of dualisms: knowing and not-knowing, the necessity for representation and the resistance of the unrepresentable, the meaning of the image that remains unsynthesized, opening up a space for the aesthetic encounter.

### **3.4 THE AESTHETIC PROMISE, THE ETHICAL DEMAND**

*To imagine in spite of all . . . calls for a difficult ethic of the image: neither the invisible par excellence (the laziness of the aesthete), nor the icon of horror (the laziness of the believer), nor the mere document (the laziness of the learned). A simple image: inadequate but necessary, inexact but true. True of a paradoxical truth, of course. I would say that here the image is the eye of history: its tenacious function of making visible. But also that it is in the eye of history: in a*

*very local zone, in a moment of visual suspense, as the “eye” of a hurricane.*

(Didi-Huberman *Images* 39)

The image is “the eye of history,” the visualizing device, but it is also the framing of an absence around which the history swirls, as around “the eye of a hurricane.” Visual aesthetics is a way of thinking about this paradoxical function of the image, between knowledge and affect. Two main points of contentions with regard to this paradoxical function have been the frame and the medium. The frame is not a simple dividing device between an image and its outside, but a way of organizing the conditions of seeing. Even more importantly, it can be a way of pointing toward the existence of the realm beyond its confines: “The frame is required in order for what exceeds or transgresses it to become visible” (Emerling 57). The philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler and Didi-Huberman devoted much thinking to such function of the frame. Deleuze summarized that “the frame teaches us that the image is not just given to be seen. It is legible as well as visible . . .” (*Cinema I* 12). As such it “testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather ‘insist’ or ‘subsist’, a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogenous space and time” (*Cinema I* 16-17).

If, as Butler has argued, norms are enacted through visual and narrative frames, and framing presupposes decisions and practices that leave substantial losses outside the frame, “then we have to consider that full inclusion and full exclusion are not the only options . . . So the point would not be to locate what is “in” or “outside” the frame but what vacillates between those two locations, and what, foreclosed, becomes encrypted in the frame itself” (Butler *Frames* 75).

Second point of contention was the question of the medium. If the frame is a way of organizing the conditions of seeing, the medium is a way of organizing the condition of framing. The medium is from the outset implicated in the process of transmission, not just as a neutral carrier: “[Medien] im Akt der Übertragung dasjenige, was sie übertragen, zugleich mitbedingen und prägen” (Krämer, qtd. in Wirth 222). Uwe Wirth referred to this power of the medium as “parergonale Kraft” (228). Every embodiment in the media is depending upon specific conditions of staging. This interrelation between the conditions of embodiment and conditions of staging can be described as a performative dimension (Fischer-Lichte 299).

Drawing from Georges Didi-Huberman, Mary Ann Doane has argued in her essay “Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity” that medium specificity is not an essentialist idea but one that is resolutely historical, capable of changing in a variety of social and cultural contexts. She notes how a medium is thought to be a material or technical means that, although limiting, nonetheless enable possibilities and variations.

A medium is an enabling impediment. Medium specificity names the crucial recursiveness of that structure that is a medium. Proper to the aesthetic, then, would be a continual reinvention of the medium through a resistance to resistance, a transgression of what are given as material limitations, which nevertheless requires those material constraints as its field of operations . . . In its very resistance, matter generates the forms and modes of aesthetic apprehension. (Doane 4).

Through this rethinking of the frame and the medium, photography presents us with a “new thought-image that ushers in altogether, new forms of experience” (Emerling 84). Such understanding of photography is crucial aspect of its “civil contract,” which

situates it in larger political discourses and makes it inseparable from the ethical demand that accompanies it since the very beginnings. The phrase “the civil contract of photography” is from the book by Tel-Aviv-born filmmaker, curator and theoretician Ariella Azoulay’s *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Azoulay explains that “the civil contract of photography is as old as photography itself” (24). It demands of us—as spectators—an engagement more than passive seeing. This “civil contract” is by no means only a contemporary phenomenon; on the contrary, it has been “part of the institutionalization of photography in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” as such it “lies at the foundation of the practice of photography, even when remaining unspoken or when photography is employed without being aware of its existence” (311).

The first part of this chapter addressed the issue of the institutionalization of photography and its promotion as the modernist medium of humanist universality in the twentieth century. This model of humanist universality was propagated above all by the MoMA exhibitions such as *The Family of Man*, with its ideological potential based upon the “pleasure of human recognition.” In his text “A Photograph is Never Alone” Blake Stimson has considered the switch from this universalist model towards a “subjectivization of documentary photography” (as a paradigmatic case, Stimson referred to Robert Frank’s project *The Americans* in 1958-59), with its critical approach that uses the camera “not as a vehicle for connection but instead as a device for distancing, othering, abstracting, a device that throws photographer and beholder back on themselves” (115). In this way, we are thrown “onward to the next photograph and the next until, in theory, we have taken them all on as our burden, our baggage, as our damaged life, as the ill-begotten flesh of our collective body photographic” (115).

Is there a possibility to think this “collective body photographic” not as a burden but as a site of connectivity, through the “civil contract” of photography with its ethical

demand, as well as through the aesthetic apprehension of others as always-already implicated in our own life by way of representation? Ariella Azoulay, as well as Griselda Pollock, have argued for this possibility. In Pollock's words, the interest in the aesthetic issues is an "unexpected turn" that:

transgresses existing political agendas and even concepts of the agonistically political with potentials that can produce transformations in this sphere in the form of reorientations, new attunements and above all new ways of imagining and releasing other forms of desire or yearning for connectivity and for the life of the other.<sup>74</sup>

Many critics have warned against the ideological pleasure taking place in the process of recognition, often related to the aestheticization of otherness. In this regard, Ariella Azoulay has recognized that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a formation of what she has termed a "political judgment of taste" (assessment that evaluates the images and establishes whether a certain image is political, and another aesthetic) in her 2010 text "Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political." In defining a "political judgment of taste" Ariella Azoulay has stated that such judgment relies on the presupposition that there are images that do not exist in the aesthetic plane and that the aesthetic or the political are attributes of images.

The aesthetic is given by way of the object's being given to the senses . . . The judgment of taste assumes the aesthetic and the political as traits of the image and the result of the artist's intention, although the aesthetic is a necessary

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<sup>74</sup> Griselda Pollock. "Unexpected Turns: The Aesthetic, the Pathetic and the Adversarial in the Long Durée of Art's Histories." *Journal of Art Historiography* 7 (2012). Web. 1. Nov 2016.  
<<http://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/7-dec2012/>>



dimension of any image and the political is not a trait but the relations between a plurality of persons. (Azoulay, “Getting rid of” 250).

“A political judgment of taste,” Azoulay concludes, “establishes that the photographer aestheticized the suffering . . . and assumes that the suffering is the object of the photograph, shaped by the photographer” (258) while the viewer’s subjectivity remained somehow “immune from the suffering that befalls others” (259). The aesthetic qualities have been criticized as having the tendency to misdirect and manipulate the perception and understanding of the image. On the other hand, they are being defended as “it is precisely through aesthetic strategies, however, that [photography] invites both critical engagement and a kind of metacritical reflection on the mass-mediated character of the disaster” (Reinhardt, qtd. in Emerling 107). To problematize the mass-mediated character of the disaster, would also mean to deal with, as Hito Steyerl and Lind have formulated: “the contested field of desires and anxieties to ‘touch the real’” (Steyerl and Lind 14). The “urgency” of the documentary is grounded in the ethical dilemma of having to give testimony to an event that cannot be conveyed as such because it contains the elements of opacity that need to be acknowledged. On the other hand, this urgency can be appropriated by charitable motives and humanitarian politics of truth focusing on “victims,” which then can even be used to legitimize both military and economic invasions.

The aforementioned authors have all confirmed that the intersection between art and documentary is still in progress and is in need of further critical investigation to determine what its task and role should be. The aesthetic promise of photographic image, Didi-Huberman has argued recalling Hannah Arendt, is that in spite of all, even lacking the truth, we can, however, find *instants of truth*. (*Images* 31).



Figure 19: Ziyah Gafić, From the series *Stories from Troubled Societies*, 2001-2002.  
[www.ziyahgafic.ba](http://www.ziyahgafic.ba)



Figure 20: Ziyah Gafić, From the series *Quest for Identity*, 2010. Source: *Aftermath*



Figure 21-22: Tarik Samarah, *Hand in Hand*, Kamenica near Zvornik (above); Karaula near Tuzla (below), from the series *Srebrenica*, 2002-2005. Source: *Aftermath*



Figure 23: Silvestar Kolbas, From the series *Red Star Cinema*, 1993-2011. Source: *Aftermath*



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PICTURING THE AFTERMATH. A CASE STUDY

#### 4.1 *INTRODUCTION*

The following case study deals with the tendencies in post-Yugoslav photography within broader strategic scope of artistic positioning related to the local, regional, and international circumstances. To perceive these tendencies strictly in documentary terms would be as misleading as to perceive its products strictly as aesthetic objects to be exhibited in a gallery setting devoid of “noise and waste”, “the entire poverty, social relations and possible ideological and intellectual implications that the work of art produces in its original context” (Gržinić 15). The thesis pursued in this dissertation is that in order to discuss these tendencies, it was necessary to rethink both the medium of photography as a document and the category of the aesthetic with regard to a re-conceptualization of transgression as a theoretical stance of border-thinking within post-traumatic culture and contradictory post-socialist condition.

In Chapter One, the critically-oriented photography-based art practice in former Yugoslavia was addressed in terms of cultural symptomatology that works with the symptoms that determine the dynamics of psychic and social life, whereby the notion of transgression refers to a dialectical movement between the contradictions and the refusal of reconciliation. This consideration was supported in Chapter Two and Chapter Three by the implementation of the travelling concept of the symptom across the fields of visual studies, critical theory, theory of photography and trauma theory.

In the final phase of my research I participated in a regional curatorial project titled *Aftermath / Changing Cultural Landscape* initiated in 2011 by the Photon Centre for Contemporary Photography Ljubljana, with the aim to investigate the role of photography in registering social, economic, cultural and political changes in the last two decades across former Yugoslavia, taking into account the differences in each particular political entity (new national states). During the 1990s, a period of growing interest in photography “was restored in such a degree that we could easily refer to its new renaissance” (Koščević 127). The partial overviews of photography-based practice before disintegration of Yugoslavia included the photographers from Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia: the 1989 exhibition *Contemporary Yugoslav Photography*, curated by Milan Aleksić and Barry Perlus at the Hartell Gallery, Ithaca, USA; and the unrealized 1996 project *Fictographs* (Aleksić 16-19). The *Aftermath* project, also necessarily just a partial overview, gathered curators from Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, as well as from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, to select photographers dealing with the contested issues of cultural memory, identity, and social experience.<sup>75</sup> It included various generations that either experienced the period before the disintegration of the common state—generation born in the period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s—, and the generation born since the late 1970s that grew up and reach their

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<sup>75</sup> The principal curatorial and research team: Miha Colner i Dejan Sluga (Slovenia), Mirjana Dabović (Montenegro), Albert Heta (Kosovo), Saša Janjić (Serbia), Ana Opalić and Sandra Vitaljić (Croatia), Zoran Petrović (Montenegro), Branka Vujanović (Bosnia-Herzegovina). Artists: Domagoj Blažević • Boris Cvjetanović • Qëndrëse Deda • Andrej Đerković • Tomaž Gregorič • Majlinda Hoxha • Astrit Ismaili • Robert Jankuloski • Genc Kadriu • Amer Kapetanović • Silvestar Kolbas • Srđan Kovačević • Borut Krajnc • Nenad Malešević • Goran Micevski • Duško Miljanić • Bojan Mrđenović • Paula Muhr • Oliver Musovik • Vigan Nimani • Ana Opalić • Lazar Pejović • Darije Petković • Ivan Petrović • Marija Mojca Pungerčar • Vojo Radonjić • Jasenko Rasol • Bojan Salaj • Tarik Samarah • Mirjana Stojadinović • Viktor Šekularac • Dejan Vekić • Sandra Vitaljić • Borko Vukosav • Milena Zarić • Ivan Zupanc • Antonio Živković. (See Appendix: *Artists' Biographies*)

artistic maturity in the period of constant crisis during the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century.

The term “cultural landscape” in the title of the project refers to a dynamic territory of exchange that outlives the disintegration of the former Yugoslav state. It is a cultural territory with shared socialist past and common issues of “post-socialist” condition: social uprising and its instrumentalization in the service of nationalist projects; decay of industry and economic collapse; privatization of public space and the commercialization of private space; resurfacing of fascistoid tendencies and the catastrophe of war; breakdown of social values and norms; new social stratification and demographic changes; appropriation and re-appropriation of memories; different types of media control and manipulation, as well as a neoliberal narrative of democratic “normalization” that so evidently cut into the lives of the inhabitants and their immediate environment (Chapter One). Even though the photographs picturing the aftermath of disintegration of former Yugoslavia are offered as documents of a specific time and place, they also function as the invitation to look for the symptoms as vehicles of a sensible encounter with and among images as living presence (Chapter Two), opening up the realm of “spectral evidence” that exceeds the process of representation and identification, taking the photograph as a way-station of another (trauma-related) topography and temporality (Chapter Three). The following conjunctural analysis puts the emphasis on the historical setting in which the photographs were produced and the theoretical and curatorial framing through which they were encountered.

## 4.2 1987 AND THE AFTERMATH

The year 1987 should be considered—for several reasons that will be revisited shortly—as the point of inflection when the historical curvature definitely changed its course. This was the year when a series of events coincided in a short period of time announcing the new course that the historical curvature has taken. The strike of coal miners issued in April and May 1987 was soon followed by the massive workers' strikes and students' revolts. The strike of the coal miners demonstrated the deeper sense of the historical moment, the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia.<sup>76</sup> As a reporter for the influential student newspaper *Studentski list*, Croatian photographer Boris Cvjetanović made a photographic series documenting the strike of the coal miners in the area of Labin in Croatia [Figure 24-28]. The first series of the photographs were published in *Studentski list* and exhibited in the Extended Media Gallery (Galerija Proširenih Medija-PM) in Zagreb, following which any further publication of the series was immediately prohibited. Zagreb Gallery of Expanded Media was one of the crucial meeting points among the artists belonging to the Yugoslav New Artistic Practice, as well as curators who participated in the formation of the scene. The gallery was forced to close its doors at the beginning of the war in 1991. A year later, an homage to this gallery was made by a group of artists united under the title *EgoEast: Croatian Art Today*.<sup>77</sup>

Cvjetanović's series had a significant social and political dimension at the time when it was made, but even more importantly, his approach brought to light something

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<sup>76</sup> Tonči Kuzmanić has designated the strike of coal miners in the area of Labin (Croatia) as a “paradigm of the beginning of the end” of Yugoslavia. See Kuzmanić.

<sup>77</sup> Jasna Jakšić (309-324) has explored the noninstitutional context of critical practices in her contribution to the volume *From Consideration to Commitment: Art in Critical Confrontation to Society* (Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, Zagreb: 1990-2010).



in the images that could not surface through the traditional reportage-like treatment of similar topics. He photographed miners' meetings, but also their intimate spaces like the common washing area, and the scenes from their private lives. The viewing position of simultaneous proximity and distance has characterized Boris Cyjetanović work as a photographer who created many documentary series dealing with the everyday life of marginalized groups, always aware of the ambiguities of documentary work and its susceptibility to manipulation (Križić Roban).

This awareness has also determined his procedure of developing the images from his photographic film, leaving the black frame visible on the paper: what we see thus is not a direct picture of the event but the imprint on paper of the image from the photographic film. The event has been framed by the photographer's own point of view, and he has insisted that this fact be acknowledged. There is, however, additional aspect to this bringing the frame into the picture: the acknowledgement of the fact that the strike itself has been framed by conflicting political agendas, the old communist bureaucracies and the new nationalist forces. The coal miners, living and working in extremely hard conditions, as social group fighting for its rights based upon the principles of self-managed Yugoslav socialism, have been manipulated by the nationalist forces and at the same time accused by the Communist Party to be the disrupting factor of the same socialism from within. The critical analysis has finally shown that:

[t]he workers did not want the end of socialism, they were actually enunciating that socialism was already gone before the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, thus making a critique of post-socialism! Moreover, despite the tragic break-up of Yugoslavia, workers' political enunciation should not be retrospectively identified with the position of liberal or national dissidents who called for market capitalism and the nation-state –workers have predominantly been

represented as blind followers of nationalist leaders— but from the position of a return to the previously strong dedication to industrial development.<sup>78</sup>

This means that “post-socialist” condition has started, as Gal Kirn has argued, already in the mid-1980s when the democratic turn in the whole cultural territory of former Yugoslavia has been monopolized by nationalist forces and put in service of advanced capitalism. Two contradictory forces were clashing against each other creating a symptom discernable in the perplexed gazes and gestures of the coal miners in Cvjetanović’s photographs, as well as in the ready-made juxtapositions that he captured. One of the photographs of the space where the meetings were taking place is composed as a diptych, one part showing the doors with four dustbins in front of it, the other part showing four miners sitting at the window pane next to the doors. The coal miners belonging to a social group that had had a crucial role for the project of socialist industrialization, have eventually become “surplus population,” to recall Karl Marx’s notion from “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation.”<sup>79</sup> One decade after Cvjetanović’s series, Macedonian artist Igor Toševski will exhibit his project titled *Dossier 96* as one of the most significant examples of conceptual art in the times of transition (Milevska 182-190). In its own way, *Dossier 96* demonstrated the consequences of the process that started in the mid-1980s with the miners’ strikes. Toševski documented deliberate mass production of rejects or faulty factory products as means of cheap and manipulative privatization of the socialist factories. From all the

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<sup>78</sup> See Kirn (2014). Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <<http://www.stasisjournal.net/all-issues/24-1-2014-revolutions-and-protest-movements/60-slovenia-s-social-uprising-in-the-european-crisis-maribor-as-periphery-from-1988-to-2012#vs13>>.

<sup>79</sup> Defined by Marx as “surplus population”—the industrial reserve army (deindustrialized redundant army), all those made redundant by the economic and political force of the (new) cycle of primitive accumulation of capital. Web. 1 Nov 2016. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm>>

waste found there, Toševski made a series of installations in various places, and the final installation, in its integral form, was exhibited in the Museum of the City of Skopje in 1997. The artist has stated that “the tons of mugs, dishes, pieces of textile, plates, glass, plastic remind of the crowds of fired workers declared as ‘unusable’ subjects” (qtd. in Petrovski 77). The miners and socially marginalized population in Boris Cvjetanović’s photographs, represent the vulnerable naked body of the people, soon to be swept away by the forces of change.

The historical change in former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia started to unravel after the death of former president Josip Broz Tito in 1980. The economic crisis was amongst the crucial triggers for the intensification of internal conflicts between the political elites in each Yugoslav republics, supported by harsh IMF austerity policies that Yugoslavia had to implement in order to refinance the debt.<sup>80</sup> By the mid-1980s different groups with different political agendas were engaged in the process of redefining the possible future. The initial democratic turn, as addressed in Chapter One, was based upon the legacy of anti-fascist resistance:

In Yugoslavia, the anti-fascist resistance and the socialist revolution were supported by a popular front uniting masses of people from diverse national, confessional and class belongings. It also united political groupings and intellectuals with very diverse ideological orientations. After liberation, a ‘division of powers’ was established between the political apparatuses, controlled by the communists, and the cultural, educational and ideological apparatuses, directed by the progressive intelligentsia. If in the beginning, the

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<sup>80</sup> For details of the austerity processes and political-economic framing of the breakup of Yugoslavia see Magaš.

cultural and ideological apparatuses were controlled above all by pre-war anti-Stalinist communists, over time the ‘cultural bureaucracy’ will turn more and more towards nationalism and the right, to establish itself as the principal anti-communist and nationalist political force in the 1980s.<sup>81</sup>

In the mid-1980s the political and cultural bureaucracies started implementing the first steps of their respective nationalist programs that would lead to the contraction and eventually to the end of Yugoslavia as a political state. In 1986 and 1987, the critical political Belgrade weekly magazine *Vreme* (*Time*) published a series of photographs of the gestures of Josip Broz Tito and Slobodan Milošević—at that time the president of the Serbian Communist Party and soon-to-be president of the government—indicating a successful imitation on the part of Milošević as the clear attempt at building-up a new personality cult for Serbian people. In the years that followed, *Vreme* continued to radically criticize Milošević’s policy and the rise of Serbian nationalism. However, the dominant cultural elite was in favor of the nationalist course: the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts published in the magazine *Večernje novosti* (Evening News) a “Memorandum” against the “anti-Serbian conspiracy” and calling for the unity of Serbian nation. The historical significance of this document is even more evident when compared to the 1987 issue of the Slovenian right-wing magazine *Nova Revija*, which

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<sup>81</sup> In his text “Excess Memory,” Rastko Močnik has explained this process, referring to the effects of manipulated politics of memory in historiographic strategies that “contribute to producing an amnesia with regard to political struggles in socialism . . . trying to present the socialist past as an ahistorical totalitarian bloc and to depoliticize the present under the aegis of the reconciliation of the victims of the totalitarianisms of the 20th century.” He referred here in particular to two deeply problematic accounts by Slovenian historians: Peter Vodopivec [*From Pohlin’s Grammar to the Independent State. Slovenian History from the End of the 18th to the End of the 20th Century*, Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006] and Božo Repe [*Slovenians in the 1980s*. Ljubljana: ZZDS, 2001]. Web. 1 Nov. 2016.  
<[http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/en/articles/202/Excess\\_Memory](http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/en/articles/202/Excess_Memory)>

was a draft for the Slovenian nationalist program (Dragović-Soso 177-195). The circle of right-wing intellectuals associated with this journal translated “their theoretical-ideological program into political demands: chiefly, independence for Slovenia. The nation-state became the key political subject, a *sine qua non* of the existence of Slovenian nationhood and its only future” (Kirn).

In this same year, the design group New Collectivism, part of the NSK movement, won the competition for the poster celebrating the Youth Day (the annual celebration of Tito’s birthday), representing a victorious young man carrying a flag and a torch. As it turned out, the poster was actually a retake on a painting by Nazi artist Richard Klein. The swastika was replaced by the five-pointed star, the eagle was replaced by the dove.<sup>82</sup> The artistic provocation that was deemed scandalous and blasphemous, came precisely at the moment when the hidden fascist-like tendencies of the nationalist projects were starting to break loose.

Within this framework, the democratic fermentation of the radical artistic, intellectual and cultural scenes, together with the students’ uprisings and workers’ strikes, were looked upon with utmost suspicion by the communist leadership as well as by the nationalist forces who strived to monopolize the democratic fervor for their own purposes. The communist leadership severely criticized the Labin strike as a betrayal of communist ideology, and was especially harsh toward journalists and photographers who were reporting on the events in Labin, including Boris Cvjetanović. The intention of the party was to undermine the social impact of the strike and to keep it out of public

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<sup>82</sup> “Once we ‘purify’ Richard Klein’s work of the Nazi symbols, we get a work with no particular content, an ‘abstract’ work. By giving it other symbols, we can re-contextualize it and give it a completely different meaning. And this is how retroavantgarde was using the language of political manipulation to avoid this manipulation.” Zabel 60-67.

attention. However, this strike lasted over a month and could not be kept secret, eventually exploding into various strikes across former Yugoslavia.

In 2011, Cvjetanović's Labin series was exhibited in a symptomatic juxtaposition bringing to light the working of power within late socialist discourse. The exhibition curated by Branka Stipančić was titled *Dialogue* and it juxtaposed Labin series with the works of Mladen Stilinović, one of the main representatives of Yugoslav retro-avant-garde together with the NSK movement. His key topics were related to the patterns of dominance and the construction of meaning through self-evident determination. Stilinović treated the issue of social tensions by combining political slogans, popular proverbs, and newspapers articles referring to the workers' strikes: "Stilinović seems to be particularly interested in such schematic forms—i.e., in the forms that construct historical time and its relations. Often, he even emphasizes their formal nature by taking them out of their original context and presenting them as autonomous structures . . . The slogans . . . serve as a screen that hides the actual relations of power, dominance and exploitation" (Zabel 257-258).

Bringing into dialogue Cvjetanović's photographs and Stilinović's critical works reveals in a symptomatic way the gap between the official socialist discourse and the material reality lived by the coal miners. In the case of the project *Aftermath*, initiated also in 2011, another kind of symptomatic juxtaposition opened up a dialectical perspective from the point of view of the present. Cvjetanović's photographs from 1987 were juxtaposed with the new series of photographs made in late 2000s when the artist revisited the same places. These places have become once more a material for the artist's sociological, historical, and political research. In the new series, photographer has also become a subject of the photographs, sitting on the rocks together with the old coal miners. This fact points not only to the intimate relation between the photographer and

his subjects during more than two decades, but also to the shared human experience, well defined by Ariella Azoulay's in terms of the civil contract of photography as a contract of partnership and solidarity that also orients us as the viewers according to the "civic duty towards the photographed person" (16). And here we can also find the potentiality of the *Aftermath* project in the face of the politics of hatred and division, promoting another kind of citizenry of photography, in which "the citizens are able to fulfill their membership in a political community in a framework not dictated by a sovereign power, where they are able to act on their own behalf" (123).



Figure 24-28: Boris Cvjetanović, From the series *Labin*, 1987-2012, Cvjetanović with former miner Vlado, 2012 (above), Details from the meetings and washing area of Labin Coal Miners, 1987 (below). Source: *Aftermath*





Figure 29-31: Antonio Živković, from the series *Reflections of a Memory*, 2001. Source: *Aftermath*

### 4.3 *LANDSCAPES OF DECAY*

#### 4.3.1 *REFLECTIONS OF A MEMORY*

The main part of the *Aftermath* project was dedicated to the genre-topic of landscape, and the reason for this lies in the dramatic transformation of the environment in the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, which can be comprehended at the level of images. However, the images do not deliver such comprehension in a straightforward documentary manner. Rather, what is required is the attention to the symptoms that, although belonging to the form and the content of the images, reach toward the reality beyond the immediately visible.

In the post-industrial landscape of former Yugoslavia, large industrial complexes stand as the artifacts of a long gone, although not so distant, past. The similar process of a society entering the post-industrial era were recorded by Berndt and Hilla Becher, addressed in Chapter Three. An *homage* to the industrial heritage that has no place in the changed circumstances of the post-industrial economy of former Yugoslavia can be seen in the series of photographs by Slovenian photographer Antonio Živkovič, made since the early 1990s, among them the series titled *Reflections of a memory* [Figure 29-31]. Influenced by Berndt and Hilla Becher, Antonio Živkovič first began to develop photographic topographies in the town Trbovlje. However, Živkovič's photographs are marked by different emotional structure. As discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Becher's photographs, it is important to bring them into relation to the issue of subjectivity within the context of a particular moment in German history instead of reducing them to seemingly "objective or scientific" recording of postindustrial landscape. By the same token, Živkovič's photographs embody concretely a form of subjectivity adequate to the aftermath of disintegration of Yugoslavia, a subjectivity

going through a zero point of identification towards an unforeseen future that at the same time has to catch up with its own past.

These photographs are not elaborate studies, they are rather sketches from memory, a sort of back drive, a detachment from the present. The deserted industrial landscape in black and white photographs appears haunted and detached. Often, there is something blocking the view, and the objects are lurking through those blockages. Moreover, these images are clearly reminiscent of the nineteenth century photography, and this anachronistic aesthetic choice is not accidental. It brings into picture the history of the city, that during the nineteenth century saw the building of the cement plant, the mechanical separator, the sawmill, and the power plant. Trbovlje was not only one of the most important industrial and mining centers in former Yugoslavia but also a city with a strong tradition of proletarian movements. The workers' movement gathered considerable momentum in the period between the two World Wars. The Commune of Trbovlje was created and the biggest miners' strike ensued in 1924. Throughout the twentieth century, Trbovlje was an important carrier of the legacy of antifascist resistance.<sup>83</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, however, the city fell into decline, as happened to other cities in the entire region.

*Reflections of a memory* are not merely about remembrance but rather about a potentiality of recollection as “bearing or a calling in mind as an openness and attentiveness (Aufmerksamkeit)” (Emerling 252), which characterizes the aesthetic

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<sup>83</sup> The industrial music group Laibach, part of the NSK movement addressed in Chapter One was founded in Trbovlje in 1980 and its members have drawn important references from this town's dramatic past in explaining their own radical activities. See, for example, the accounts gathered online at <<http://www.laibach.org/interviews-1980-to-1985/>>. Antonio Živkovič also collaborated with Laibach photographing their music performances.

perception. They are acts of memory which Walter Benjamin has termed the “turn of recollection” through images.

#### 4.3.2 *MODEL FOR A “FUTURE”*

In the process of restitution of capitalism after the change of socio-economic system, the economy of consumption took the primacy over the production capacity, which actually resulted in the decay of local trading companies and local economy. Croatian photographer Bojan Mrdjenović embarked on a mission to record the abandoned buildings of the former trading company named “Budućnost” (eng. the future) [Figure 32]. This particular company bearing a symptomatic name inspired by the socialist idea of progress, was founded in 1954, and its headquarters were in the small town of Pakrac close to the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the 1960s, the Pakrac model of the “public commercial house” spread all over the country and became an integral and indispensable part of the new urbanistic plans in Yugoslavia on its way to prosperity. Within the socialist self-managed residential units, the public commercial house was situated in the center, becoming in a concrete sense an image of Yugoslav socialist experiment, especially in the small developing cities. Such exclusive position of the public commercial house in the city center will become obsolete in the new consumption-based economy that has swallowed entire cities by the end of the twentieth century. The city of Pakrac itself was almost completely destroyed during the war in 1991, littered with landmines and divided between the Serbs and the Croats during and in the aftermath of the conflict. Once a driving force of the local economy, the trading company “Budućnost” has been in decay ever since the war, and finally closed in 2006.

Mrdjenović's procedure differs significantly from that of Antonio Živković. In the straight "new topographic" style, he wanted to create perfectly balanced compositions in which nothing would stand in the way of looking frontally at the buildings, emphasizing thus their monumental effect. The photographer has made a substantial effort to pinpoint the best season and time of day to create the most appropriate atmosphere for representing his idea about these buildings as *monuments*. The sky in all the images is the same, without clouds and without sun, like a perfectly neutral background. The company's name "Budućnost" written on this pale blue background, stands as a symptom of the clash between dreamworld and catastrophe, to use Susan Buck-Morss' useful phrase.

The visual impact of these abandoned buildings resonates with another architectural-sculptural form of the "witnesses of an unrealized future, or specters that continue to haunt the present" (Kirn and Burghardt 65): Yugoslavian partisan antifascist memorials. The important difference is that these memorials did not occupy the highly-visible sites of representation such as the town squares and city centers. While the buildings of "Budućnost" trading company, merging the production and the consumption, figured as the communal meeting points on a daily basis in the city centers, the partisan memorials "were placed in parks, showcased by leisure-time destination with picnic facilities . . . In yet another memorial parks, museums or amphitheaters served as open-air classrooms . . . merging leisure with education" (Kirn and Burghardt 67). Thus, attention to these witnesses of an unrealized future should not be understood as a politically empty nostalgic inclinations, but as a call for "retrieving the emancipator and antifascist politics they embody . . . They maintain an invisible network throughout the territory of former Yugoslavia and make apparent the disruption and segmentation of a formerly common space" (75). Although in ruins, the

“Budućnost” buildings remain distinct due to their striking architectural forms and contradictions that can be read across their façades. Particularly telling is a combination of styles in the former secessionist palace known as Kuća Grgurić, built in 1906. When it became property of the communist state, all details pointing to a bourgeois lifestyle were removed, and the façade of the building was almost completely remodeled. Mrdjenović has noted that this building reflects all the changes during the twentieth century, and today functions within the city scape as a symptom of unpredictability of current state of things.



Figure 32: Bojan Mrđenović, Kuća Grgurić (built 1906), From the series *Budućnost [The Future]*, 2008-2012. Source: *Aftermath*

#### 4.3.3 *NEW HORIZON*

The process of transition has been going on for so long in former Yugoslavia and the Balkans that it has become a permanent condition of all neighbouring countries for over two decades and it has influenced all spheres of public and private life. The photographic series explicitly titled *Transition* [Figure 33] by Montenegrin artist Duško Miljanić is part of a wider collection that deals with the simultaneous presence of the past and the present in processes of social transformation towards the capitalist system. Apart from the explicit title, these landscapes are enigmatic in their lack of any precise feature that could be localized immediately. At first glance, they could seem to be taken out of an old American Western movie, or to be entirely fictional. What is certain is that they are located somewhere in-between, and it seems that the time there has been extended indefinitely. The ambiguity and absurdity of these landscapes do not express directly the “post-socialist” condition. Rather, these images symptomize the visible environment at the outskirts of post-socialist cities in order to bring to the view the paradoxical temporality of “permanent transition.”

This paradoxical temporality is also captured in the series of photographs made in the suburbs of Podgorica by Vojo Radonjić, who since the mid-1980s contributed the most for the promotion of art photography in Montenegro. His photographs are often created in a single take. These images do not insist on capturing the significant moments but rather building upon the principle of continuous and long processes. The space was created “by the functional curvature of the horizon due to the curvature of the camera with a rotating lens. The rotation of the horizon creates the feeling of the rotation of the planet itself, we feel its diameter, its silent moving” (Dabović-Pejović 92).

The peripheral scenes stuffed with plastic, metal and cardboard waste, which are to be seen in Radonjić's photographs, have become symptomatic of the world we live in [Figure 34]. A group of Montenegrin socially engaged photographers, although different in their artistic expression and belonging to different generations, share the same dedication to the topic of ecology and rapidly spreading pollution that have transformed Montenegro—a declared *ecological* state—“into a blurred gray area where under the auspices of economic progress, all natural resources are being ruthlessly destroyed and cultural heritage completely disregarded” (Dabović-Pejović 87). The understanding of photography as a “new topography” in Montenegro testifies on an important aspect of the entire artistic scene, the focus on the environment. One of the most important representatives of this stream is Lazar Pejović who brought significant changes in the field by introducing a new approach to contemporary landscape photography. He has documented deserted landscapes marked by visible traces of human presence, while the waste of consumer society became a new “legitimate” factor of the landscape itself. His latest series titled “Metaphysical landscapes” is extremely ambivalent in that it offers the possibility of different codifications, thus putting the interpretive framing in question. The fact that these highly aestheticized images are printed in billboard dimensions adds another layer of complexity, as at first glance these images might appear to be advertising billboards of a tourist company. Paying close attention to the details in the image, however, will reveal that the idyllic landscapes are actually packed with trash or that the inscription FOR SALE appears in the midst of the green mountain scenery.





Figure 33: Duško Miljanić, from the series *Transition*, 2009. (Set-up view). Source: *Aftermath*



Figure 34: Vojo Radonjić, from the series *Untitled*, 2003. (Set-up view). Source: *Aftermath*

#### 4.3.4 PUBLIC SPACE: EMPTINESS AND OCCUPATION

To track down and to register the evident or hidden traces of the transitional phenomena is a continuing task that the photographers in former Yugoslavia have bestowed upon themselves with great responsibility and dedication. One of direct consequences of the changes in the social and economic system is an aggressive mercantilisation of the environment that promotes consumerism as the driving force of the system. The fundamental unit of such a system is advertising / billboards that reveal the invisible forces of the ruthless struggle for dominance, growing exploitation, and the contradictions of contemporary capital-ridden world.

The ongoing project *Emptiness* by Slovenian photographer Borut Krajnc, initiated in 2004, documents the unusual moments of emptiness in between the aggressive advertisement campaigns, when the billboards, those inevitable elements of any contemporary urban and suburban landscape, do not picture anything [Figure 35]. “Through a straight topographic approach he comments on the banality of the present time defined by the relentless usage of the public and private space for commercial purposes.”<sup>84</sup> Krajnc has been working in the domain of documentary photography since 1990, and he has been a photojournalist of the weekly magazine *Mladina*. He registered the war events (1991), the accession to the EU (2004) and introduction of Euro (2007), and focusing particularly on the commercialization of the cultural–urban and rural–environment.

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<sup>84</sup> Miha Colner explains it in detail in his text titled “Traces of Locality. Traditions and Identities of Contemporary Photography in Former Yugoslavia.” *VASA Journal on Images and Culture* 6 (2014). Web. 1 Nov. 2016. <[http://vjic.org/?page\\_id=957](http://vjic.org/?page_id=957)>

What is that which the *Emptiness* actually reveals as a symptom of such commercialization of public space? The thing is that in socialist times, the public space was never empty, the slogans, images and symbols were unavoidable part of everyday life. It was not necessary that anybody actually believes in those slogans, as long as everybody formally comply with them so that the social order is maintained and functional. The emptiness is also a symptom of the erased social conscious after the breakdown of social order.

Croatian photographer Darije Petković has designated the commercialization of former public spaces and disintegration of local economies as the process of occupation. His visual research bluntly exposes the economic changes by showing the most obvious examples of financial takeover. In his photographic series he juxtaposes the symbols of national identity and the symbols of domestic or multi-national corporations [Figure 36]. Due to the effects of light, often resulting from very long exposures, his images are characterized by softness that deliberately contradicts their aggressive content.

Moreover, given the title of this series, the artist has drawn the explicit references to the fascist occupation in the World War II. The title refers to Lordan Zafranović's film *Occupation in 26 pictures* showing how a multi-national city of Dubrovnik has been ethnically cleansed during the Second World War by Nazi and Croatian Ustasha armies. By the end of the twentieth century, Dubrovnik has again become a place of death on mass scale, followed by the post-war ruthless economic colonization.



Figure 35: Borut Krajnc, Arja Vas-Velenje Road, Velika Pirešica, From the series *Emptiness*, 2004-2008. Source: *Aftermath*



Figure 36: Darije Petković, *Occupation in 26 Pictures*, 2010. Source: *Aftermath*



#### 4.4 *SCENES OF CRIME*

##### 4.4.1 *LAST SHOTS AND AFTERWARDS*

Among the most powerful images of the entire war-stricken epoch in former Yugoslavia remains a photograph showing the empty main street in Dubrovnik taken on December 6, 1991. In Benjamin's parlance, it is a "scene of a crime," reminiscent of Eugène Atget's deserted Paris, featuring no actual event, but nevertheless invoking all the horrors that might have been or are going to occur in a matter of seconds [Figure 37-39]. This photograph belongs to a series made by Pavo Urban (1968-1991), then twenty-three-year-old student at the Academy of Theater and Film, who was killed while taking these photographs on the day that Serbian paramilitary troops under the name of Yugoslav Army started the air attacks on Dubrovnik. The series of six photographs were developed from Urban's negatives and given the title "Posljednji snimci" [The Last Shots]. Some of the most important symbols of Dubrovnik are present in these photographs: Sv. Vlaho [St. Blaise], the protector of the city, the Croatian flag, a sign of rising nationalism, and Orlando's Column with the figure of a medieval warrior carved into the column.<sup>85</sup>

Previous to this series of photographs, Pavo Urban created a chronicle of the life in Dubrovnik at the beginning of destruction. "The moment of death came exactly when he succeeded to put Orlando in the center of the scene. At that moment he made this perfect photograph, and died. There you have everything: a situation that explains the whole

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<sup>85</sup> The column was erected by the citizens of Dubrovnik in honor of the medieval hero Orlando (Rolando), who according to the legend helped liberate Dubrovnik from the Arab pirates in the eight century. The figure was carved by local master Antun Dubrovčanin in 1418.

context.” These words were spoken at the opening of the exhibition of the artists from Dubrovnik at the Cultural Centre Belgrade in 2014. The exhibition titled “The City is Dead. Long Live the City!” was the first representation of the independent scene from Dubrovnik in Serbian capital since the end of the war, and for the first time Urban’s photographs could be seen by the public in Serbia.

The aforementioned words belong to Slaven Tolj, former director of the Workshop Lazareti in Dubrovnik and current director of the Museum of modern and contemporary art in Rijeka. Slaven Tolj’s activities during the 1990s contributed significantly to the articulation of the critical cultural scene in Croatia, and his artistic work was profoundly marked by his war experiences as well by the reanimation of the principles of Yugoslav avant-garde in times of cultural and political conservatism. This engagement was designated by various interrelated terms: active nihilism or aesthetics of withdrawal. The term “active nihilism” comes from a programmatic text by Croatian philosopher Mario Kopačić who supported the first symbolic action that marked the beginning of the war and led to the opening of the Art Workshop Lazareti in 1994 as a site of cultural resistance: “We felt that we were opening a completely new space of action and that gave us enormous energy . . . Active nihilism was a term that we used to determine our actions at that time and to define our position of continuous artistic activism in the context of growing tension and coming social, political, economic changes.”<sup>86</sup> The terms “aesthetics of withdrawal” is a term by which Anthony Gardner has defined the

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<sup>86</sup> My translation from Slaven Tolj’s interview titled “Transplantation of social reality into the performative reaction” in the magazine *Zarez* (27 Jan. 2005). Web. 1 Nov. 2016.

specificity of the avant-garde reawakening in Slaven Tolj's performances with regard to a radical distancing from the Western parameters.<sup>87</sup>

It could also be argued that there is an aesthetic of withdrawal in the images that do not picture the war directly as is the case with mainstream news reportages driven by the moto "if it bleeds it leads." Instead, for the artists of the aftermath, the question becomes crucial of how to visualize a scene of crime if there is no trace left, no blood, no bodies. Fifteen years after the area of has been declared clear of landmines, another artist from Dubrovnik, Ana Opalić, made a series of photographs along the paths that marked the zone of confrontation between Croatian and Serbian troops on the route Srđ-Strinčijera-Bosnaka-Žarkovica.

Landscape in [these] photographs ceases to be a genre that can be considered in the context of the aesthetic history of the photographic medium and its inherent formalistic discourse. It becomes a scene of mass crime. Mass crime is cultural fact. Nevertheless, seen as a crime scene, these landscapes are irreducible to the category of documentary photography. For, event in the image cannot be seen.

That is why I say this is a photographic crypto-referent. (Kovač 43).

A photographic crypto-referent in Leonida Kovač's analysis is that which eludes any signifying system, something that does not figure in the plane of representation. As discussed in Chapter Three, in order to theoretically define the photography of trauma, Ulrich Baer has used the term "spectral evidence" pointing to something that exceeds the

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<sup>87</sup> The term was introduced in Gardner's presentation "Relational Aesthetics and Postsocialist Critique: Testing the Horizon of the Aesthetics of Democratization" at the conference *Transforming aesthetics* hosted by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in association with the University of New South Wales Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics (7-9 July 2005).



record of the past as a series of frozen moments in a continuous flow, something that requires a special kind of historical understanding that photography alerts us to—a “Democritean gaze.” That is a disjointed, non-unified experience of reality that does not fit in a coherent sequence. The contradiction between the image of nature in Opalić’s photographs and the invisible traumatic specter corresponds to the clash between the discursive construct of the “indifference of nature” (the cycles of life and death, the “natural” course of events) and the resistance of the symptom that breaks the flow, the un-experienced and yet the unforgotten.

#### 4.4.2 INFERTILE GROUNDS

The strategic artistic research into the landscape of trauma is extremely important because it resists the simplification of meaning, which often characterizes the media-generated interpretation and manipulated information.<sup>88</sup> The politics of hatred on each side in the conflict was explored by Croatian artist Sandra Vitaljić in her book *War Images: Contemporary War Photography*, published in 2013, exploring the power of images in the press and the role of television.<sup>89</sup> Sandra Vitaljić has been exploring with great dedication the specific crime scenes related to the perpetrators of different nationalities. These are places that have been highly instrumentalized in spreading the propaganda of heroization or victimization. There are, however, also places that have

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<sup>88</sup> Drawing on extensive interviews with journalists in the region, Kemal Kurspahić, a journalist himself, has given an account on the politics of hatred in the media during the 1990s in his book *Balkan Media in War and Peace*. Kurspahić was editor-in-chief of the Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje* between 1988 and 1994. He was named the World Press Review’s International Editor of the Year in 1993 and the International Press Institute’s World Press Freedom Hero in 2000.

<sup>89</sup> A shorter version of the text is available online. Web. 1 Nov. 2016.

<[https://www.academia.edu/10347330/War\\_of\\_Images\\_-\\_Contemporary\\_War\\_Photography](https://www.academia.edu/10347330/War_of_Images_-_Contemporary_War_Photography)>.

been completely ignored, while the events occurred in those places have been pushed into oblivion. Vitaljić's research project started in 2008 under the title *Infertile Grounds*. She embarked on a mission to visit the places of institutionalized memory, as well as those that had never been marked by a memorial. The photographs are meant to conjure up these gaps in the politics of memory.

In the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, particularly horrific was a process that Rastko Močnik has referred to as “anti-antifascism,” inseparable from the discourse of national rebirth and the “nationalization of antifascism.” This means that different national groups have reconstructed the antifascist past from their own nationalist positions, depending on their interests in the present, paradoxically, since the antifascist movement in Yugoslavia was decidedly supranational. At the same time, the antifascist struggle has been reinterpreted to match the needs of the mythologized past. In Croatia, the narrative prevailed in which the defense against Serbian aggression in the 1990s led to the justification and restoration of the Ustasha nationalist organization of the World War II. In the new geography of memory, Jasenovac—the main memorial site of the victims of fascist occupation—has been marginalized, while Bleiburg—the memorial site of the killed members of the Ustasha units at the end of the war—has been promoted as the place of the new national pilgrimage.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Under the leadership of Ante Pavelić, the Ustashes fought for the racially pure Independent State of Croatia (NDH), collaborating with Italian and German occupation army. Jasenovac concentration camp was a death camp built by the authorities of the Independent State of Croatia, installed in Croatian territory by the Nazi-fascist occupation forces and run by the Ustasha units. Between August 1941 and April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1945, along with the Orthodox Serbs, Jew and Roma population, a large number of Croats were killed in the camp as well, because they were communists and anti-fascists. After the crash of the Independent State of Croatia with the fall of Nazism, a number of the Ustasha and Home Guard units (domobranci) and a number of civilians retreated in fear of revenge from the partisans towards the Austrian border in the

Starting with the recognized sites of conflicting memories, such as Jasenovac and Bleiburg, Vitaljić goes further to construct the places of memory that have not existed before, that have been banished from the field of representation or the events have not been considered significant enough to be commemorated.

For this reason, Sandra Vitaljić's photographs first "empty" any meaning, then oppose this violent oblivion with a straightforward, dry historiographical text. With this action, Sandra Vitaljić turns the legal and intellectual cannon of The Hague, which gives less weight to words than to images, on its head—verbal evidence supplements and exceeds the void visual evidence. A fern caught in the sunlight, a strip of fog, a pitiful tree in a rockery, a reflection in a pond, patchy grass, remnants of a wall long overgrown: do they mean anything? Of course not: they are a mere indication of European cultural entry into examining responsibility which is both the only way of surviving in the future, and the only means of regulating the present. (Slapšak 15).

The photographs of the places are always accompanied by texts that explain the events in detail. There is a clash between the titles and the explanations, since the names of some locations could evoke idyllic memories, such as those of spending weekends at the mountain Sljeme near Zagreb, and the popular hiking lodge Adolfovac. But Vitaljić reminds us that nearby "on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1991, around 11PM, five reservists of the Croatian police (so-called Merčep's escadrons of death) entered the apartment of a Serbian family Zec . . . Mihajlo Zec, who tried to escape, was killed on the spot. His wife Marija and 12-year-old daughter Aleksandra, who witnessed the murder, were taken by

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hope of surrendering to the British forces, and gathered near the Carinthian town of Bleiburg, where the British forces handed them over to the partisans.

van to the mountain lodge Adolfovac on Sljeme near Zagreb, shot and buried there.” (13). This scene of crime was not marked, and it does not belong to the Croatian national politics of memory. The hiking lodge Adolfovac was itself burnt down to the ground in 1993. Now it is “just a forgotten ruin,” writes Vitaljić.

Through the series *Infertile Grounds*, it is possible to read the historical details of the very beginning of the war in Croatia. After Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia, the members of Serbian minority, supported by what was once the Yugoslav Army, rebelled against the local Croatian police and newly formed armed forces. One of the first places of the outbreak was the town of Pakrac with its surrounding areas. In March 1991, when the conflict occurred, both Serbs and Croats in their respective official media portrayed each other as faceless monstrous enemy, the evil other. Serbian media reported that Croatia was committing genocide against Serbian minority. On the other side, Croatian media were creating a heroic narrative according to which the Serbian aggressor was trying to annihilate the city of Pakrac, while few Croatian soldiers were fighting courageously against it. The territory was captured by Serbian troops in 1991 and recaptured by Croatian armed forces in 1995. From August to December 1991, Serbian troops organized a concentration camp in Bučje near Pakrac [Figure 40]. “After disbanding the camp, the detainees were taken to Stara Gradiška prison and they were exchanged in January 1992 under the supervision of the International Red Cross. No one has yet convicted for the crimes in the Bučje camp” (*Aftermath* 61). Nowadays, it is an impoverished and predominantly deserted area. We can recall that previous to the war, Pakrac was a home of the trading company “The Future,” which was converted into a monument of the past in a photographic series by Bojan Mrdjenović.

Another photograph in the series *Infertile Grounds* shows a clearing in the forest in the area called Medak Pocket [Figure 41]. This area includes the villages of Divoselo,

Čitluk and Počitelj, where Croatian army launched a military operation Medak Pocket, which had the aim of reducing the pressure of Serbian rebels on the city of Gospić. In the process, Serbian civilians were killed after the successful operation. Most of them were more than sixty years old. “Serbian properties were systematically looted and destroyed to prevent Serbian population for returning. In 2000 another 11 corpses were found in one septic tank in the part of the town which used to be inhabited by Serbs” (*Aftermath* 60). Nowadays, as was the case with the area of Pakrac, the area of Medak Pocket is also a largely deserted area haunted by its recent traumatic past.

As trauma cannot be represented, it can be symptomized through the ambivalent image of an empty landscape that is now rarely referred to as somebody’s home. The interrelation between the image and its textual inscription is of crucial importance. “History is not visually inscribed in the landscape itself,” writes Sandra Vitaljić, “I endeavor to create a place of memory within the space of the photograph, an alternative memento that is not created by ideology, rather by the need to open up the space of remembrance for victims who are never going to acquire their own space in the official culture of memory” (“Infertile” n.pag.). It is this interrelation between the aesthetic and the documentary that transforms an undefined space into a place of memory. Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de memoire* refers to the important places around which the culture of memory is built up as a sphere of ritual in modern societies. In case of former Yugoslavia, only those places that correspond to current national needs in the official culture of memory are accepted, marked by memorial plaques and thoroughly ritualized. Memorial places are ambiguous, susceptible to change of meaning and purpose. The volume *Kultura pamćenja i istorija* [Culture of memory and History] edited by Brkljačić and Prlenda gathers the texts by important authors such as Jan Assman and Hold Sundhaussen dealing with the construction of memory in Yugoslavia and its successor

states. Drawing from these analyses, Vitaljić explores the ways to construct new non-ritualized places through a reference to the traditional genre of landscape photography. Moreover, landscape is an image that invites and denies access at the same time, as the viewer is being attracted and repulsed simultaneously by the feeling of uneasiness between the beauty of nature and the culture of tragedy.



Figure 40-41: Sandra Vitaljić, Bučje near Pakrac (above), Medački džep (below), From the series *Infertile Grounds*, 2009. Source: *Aftermath*

#### 4.4.3 11/07/95

On July 11, 1995, at the very end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the troops of Serbian general Ratko Mladić broke into the demilitarized Muslim enclave Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, that was under the protection of the U.N.-forces since 1993. Since 2000 the process continues of exhumation and identification of the victims of mass murder committed on that day. Sarajevo-based photographer Tarik Samarah has documented the process of exhumation and dedicated many years to the exploration of the topic. In 2005, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre, he published his photo-book *Srebrenica. Genocide at the Heart of Europe*.

The photographer insisted on presenting his work in politically relevant settings such as U.N.-headquarters in New York and Geneva, Holocaust Museum, Dutch Parliament in Den Hague. In 2012, he opened a gallery in Sarajevo under the name *11/07/95*. The permanent exhibition consists in three parts: the photographic series dedicated to Srebrenica, the *Wall of Death*, and the interactive part *Mapping genocide*. The sixteen-meter long *Wall of Death* contains the names and ages of the 8372 people killed in Srebrenica. Names and ages were collected by the *Memorial Center in Potočari*. Part of the permanent exhibition are also 640 personal photos compiled by the mothers of Srebrenica. The interactive part offers a detailed description through maps, texts, drawings, photographs and videos. The part dedicated to oral history is a project of the Cinema for Peace foundation-Genocide Film Library.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> For more information visit the website of the Memorial Gallery 11/07/95 Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina: <<http://galerija110795.ba>>



The gallery concept supports Tarik Samarah's approach to photography in general: the implementation of aesthetic strategies in order to enhance the bodily experience of viewing (the juxtaposition, the lighting, the framing), and the accompanying documentary material that provides in-depth information. As addressed in Chapter Three, these photographs do not call for the identification with the victims nor do they intend to shock the viewers by the scenes of abominable violence. The atmosphere, the dynamic of light and darkness, the attention to detail, the framing of the scenes are all aesthetic devices employed by the photographer with the utmost care in order to provoke in the viewer the very experience of viewing, the impossible experience of witnessing. The unknown, the unresolved, the hidden background of the crime is lurking from behind the representation: the image is, as Didi-Huberman has written, the half-open door to the realm of the Real. The very impossibility to enter and the strange sensation of being seen by something hidden behind the half-open door of the image is what makes the experience of viewing the Srebrenica photographic series so intense, and at times horrifying, even when nothing horrific is actually shown. Although the corpses have been removed from the mass graves, and the names of the victims written in the memorial, what is missing will not be filled in. The words of Hannah Arendt still resonate with us, in different historical moment:

Before that we said: Well, one has enemies. That is entirely natural. Why shouldn't a people have enemies? But this was different. It was really as if an abyss had opened. *This ought not to have happened*. And I don't just mean the number of victims. I mean the method, the fabrication of corpses and so on . . . This should not have happened. Something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves. None of us ever can. (Arendt 14).

In order to introduce these photographs into the everyday reality of the citizens to rise their awareness, Tarik Samarah employed a strategy of intervening into public space and monumentalization of images, mounted on the important points in the cities, such as the monument of antifascism “Eternal Flame” in Sarajevo city center [Figure 42], where we see monumentalized and located strategically, the drop of blood from the finger of the family members that is used to identify the victims.



Figure 42: Tarik Samarah, Srebrenica memorial, Set-up above the Eternal Flame-Antifascist Memorial, Sarajevo, July 11, 2003. Source: <http://scca.ba/exhibitions/art-actions/july-11/>

## 4.5 *INTIMACY AND SOCIETY*

### 4.5.1 *BELONGING*

A generation of photographers that grew up in times of war—born between the beginning of the 1970s and the end of the 1980s—created a corpus of archive-based photo-diaries and photo-portraits that can provide an insight into the consequences of political, socio-economic, cultural and demographic changes, as well as the facets of a new urban culture at the turn of the century. They have raised a number of questions about the fragmentary and ambivalent nature of the archive, exploring the ways in which it can open new, even contradictory, ways of understanding.<sup>92</sup>

These series do not pretend to offer an overarching critical perspective. Rather, they are trying to capture the fragments that are left unregistered in the overall picture of the state of things, the fragments that become exceptional in their ordinariness. The parameter of ambiguity in these series takes the primacy over the critical parameter, as well as the intimate point of view takes the primacy over the documentary.

Such approach is focused upon the ephemeral events that either pass by unnoticed, or are perceived according to certain sets of conventions. The artists are using the medium of photography in order to disrupt these conventions, given that there is a close

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<sup>92</sup> The use of archive in contemporary art has been investigated by Okwui Enwezor in “Archive Fever: Photography between History and Monument.” Enwezor starts from a definition of the archive, drawing from Michel Foucault’s *The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse of Language*, as “an active, regulatory discursive system,” and goes on to address Jacques Derrida’s notion of *Archive Fever*, concluding that “artistic interventions can activate more complex reflections on the relationship between the photographic document and historical consciousness. Archives represent scenes of unbearable historical weight and therefore open up a productive space for artists in the form of aesthetic, ethical, political, social, and cultural speculation” (23).

complicity between such conventions and the conventions of the photographic apparatus itself. As Vilém Flusser has argued in his *Philosophy of Photography*, all photographic images are surfaces that translate everything into states of things, which is a function of “the programming [that] proceed[s] in a mindless automatic fashion . . . life is coming to mean feeding apparatuses and being fed by them” (80). The artists are aware that there is no “such thing as a naïve, non-conceptual photography:

They are conscious that image, apparatus, program and information are the basic problems that they have to come to terms with. They are in fact consciously attempting to create unpredictable information, i.e. to release themselves from the camera, and to place within the image something that is not in its program (81).

Although the photographs are presented as documents, the aesthetic concerns are openly demonstrated in order to bring forth the staged character of the captured scenes through framing, body positioning, gazes, and context. Thus the photographs are able to avoid producing yet another image which compounds the restricted, simplified or manipulative perception of the post-socialist condition in former Yugoslavia. There are five main characteristics to be discerned in this regard, drawing from a general analysis of post-socialist art provided by Igor Zabel in his influential text titled “Intimacy and Society”: first, there is an issue of the exoticized view through which Eastern European subjects have usually been presented; second, the alluring power of the consumer society and advertisement; third, the social function of the new media; fourth, the transformation of the bodily regime from socialist society to the new highly competitive capitalist society; and finally, the micro-level of everyday life and its details, “from the choice of objects that surrounded people at home, at work and in the city, to the way the passengers were communicating on a city bus” (Zabel 107). Therefore, Zabel concludes:

analysis and reflection of one's personal circumstances, everyday life and experience necessarily involve also an (implicit or explicit) research of the social, political and ideological structures that shaped such experiences . . . In such a way, these works function as paradigms and means for reading as the newly developed, post-communist social structure and their effects and aims through the details of everyday reality (107).

In the series of photo-diptychs by Croatian photographer Borko Vukosav, the most intimate sleeping spaces represent the persons' identity cards [Figure 43]. The coloured part of the diptych documents the personal living spaces with the intention of capturing in every detail the bed and belongings in its proximity. In contrast to the self-advertising images that proliferate through media, the protagonists in this series are portrayed in the second part of the diptych, standing naked frontally, each in the same light and composition, as black and white studio portraits, reminiscent of the medical or psychiatric surveys. The studio environment was used with the aim of completely isolating a person from his/her personal context. All portrayed people were deliberately displaced from what characterises their social, intellectual status and religious beliefs. They all appear to belong to the same social group, when in reality some of them are homeless people sleeping at the bench near the church in one of the squares of the city of Zagreb. Through photography Borko Vukosav reacts to the most acute and topical situation his generation is faced with – the ongoing struggle for material status and instability within the competitive capitalist system after the collapse of social welfare, and the ruthless stratification of society.

A series by another photographer from Zagreb, Srđan Kovačević, deals with the lives of young people in transition countries that have been suspended under constant crisis and unfulfilled expectations. The series titled "Before Leaving" was initiated

incidentally as a number of his friends was preparing to leave the country and he happened to portray their lives just before their departure. The dramatic experience of having to start anew is tempered by an ambiguous sense of calm in the persons' postures, which is rather symptomatic of the inability to stay or to decide to move. At the time of their creation, these photographs have not even been intended for the public. Eventually, however, they have become an important case for post-socialist symptomatology. The same can be said of the series of snapshot photography by Kosovo artist Qëndresë Deda, working across different media, using camera as a mirror for her longing for connection that can be extended to a whole generation:

The other, passion for the real. Eye contact, the gaze, the big other, desire.

Trying to look at the camera like I am looking at you . . . I am trying to capture the presence of something that is not present psychically. The idea of being.

Connections. People and idea of them that exists even when it is not in front of

us but make us – alive. People. We need their presence even when it is

imaginary. Life drive. Fundamental fantasy. Daydreams. Dependence and

symbiosis. Longing. Mix of reality and dream. Disorder.<sup>93</sup>

The issue of belonging is a loaded question, particularly so in Kosovo in the period between 1989 and 1999, and afterwards. The artists born after the destruction of Yugoslavia have created works that “search for a time in the past as well as works that concentrate on the alternative signifiers that are not always selected by the mainstream to narrate the future voyage of this new country” (Heta 65). Using the alternative signifiers they articulated the ambiguity of the sense of belonging.

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<sup>93</sup> Qëndresë Deda: “Looking at the camera like I am looking at you.” Disorder platform:

<<https://dis0rd3r.wordpress.com/2012/08/21/qendrese-deda/>>

In a family portrait by Kosovo artist Majlinda Hoxha we see four members of a family standing next to each other in an empty pool [Figure 44]. The image of an empty pool takes up a function of framing of social positioning. It is at the same time livable and unlivable, believable and unbelievable, ordinary and absurd. The family photograph of the sort usually taken on vacation or on family gatherings here becomes a symptom of a precarious, non-defined situation that impedes any sense of belonging. Using photography Hoxha explores the idea of the uncanny that haunts our ambiguous image of ourselves. By staging a photograph in this way, the artist forces a reflection upon a viewer for she can never be certain of what it is she is actually looking at. The persons are displayed in a pool like species in a glass box for further observation.

The portraits and self-portraits in these photographic series bring something forth that has been obscured through the identity-inferring narratives: the ambiguity in the sense of belonging and the vulnerability at the core of subjectivity, which is inscribed in the expressionless gaze oriented towards the camera as an-other. We can recall here the typological approach of August Sander in his project *The Face of Our Time* from 1929 (see Chapter 3). The expressionless faces and the distance of photographed persons in Sander's project was in the service of his mission to create an archive of social types, not of individual characters. In contemporary photography, this is employed as an aesthetic strategy to articulate, as George Baker has written, "the decay of social rootedness and fixed placement" (qtd. in Emerling 146). In an essay devoted to an analysis of the photography of August Sander, Baker defined the photographic image as torn between narrative and stasis, rupturing simultaneously the narrative cohesion of his archival compilation of portraits and its supposedly photographic dedication to immobility (cf. Baker 125-126). Contemporary photographers play with representational codes in order to disrupt the frames of references or cultural realms that they can no longer adequately

represent. The status of the photographic image, precisely because it is “torn between narrative and stasis” is employed as a symptom of post-socialist condition, that is constantly being framed and reframed through different interpretive strategies, and thus reproduced anew with each new interpretation. In his Glossary of the Politics of Contemporary Life (KFS), under the entry “Post-socialism and Transition,” Šuvaković has argued that post-socialism functions as a “production of actual life” in which “newly established relation between collective and the individual is given in a contradictory way . . . . Recombination and recycling the sense is almost incredible in its contradictory nature” (154-155).





Figure 43: Borko Vukosav, from the series *Person/Possession*, 2011. (set-up view).  
Source: *Aftermath*

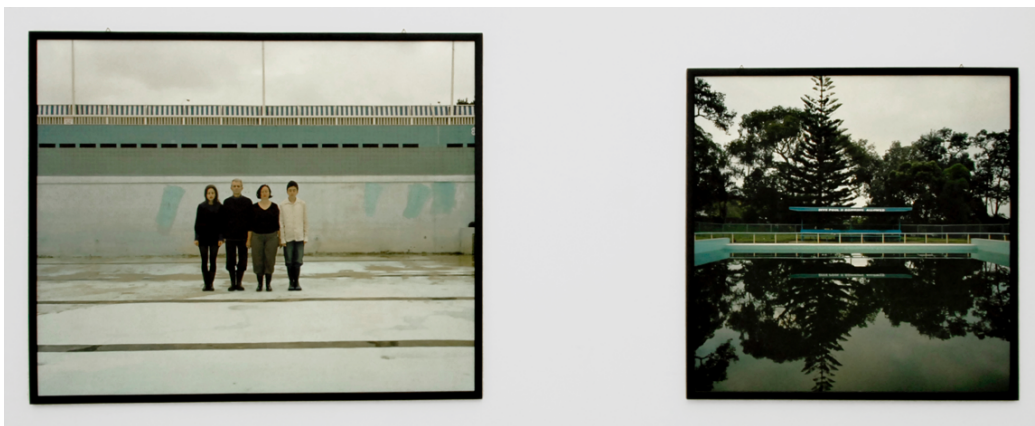


Figure 44: Majlinda Hoxha, *Family Portrait*, 2008. (set-up view). Source: *Aftermath*

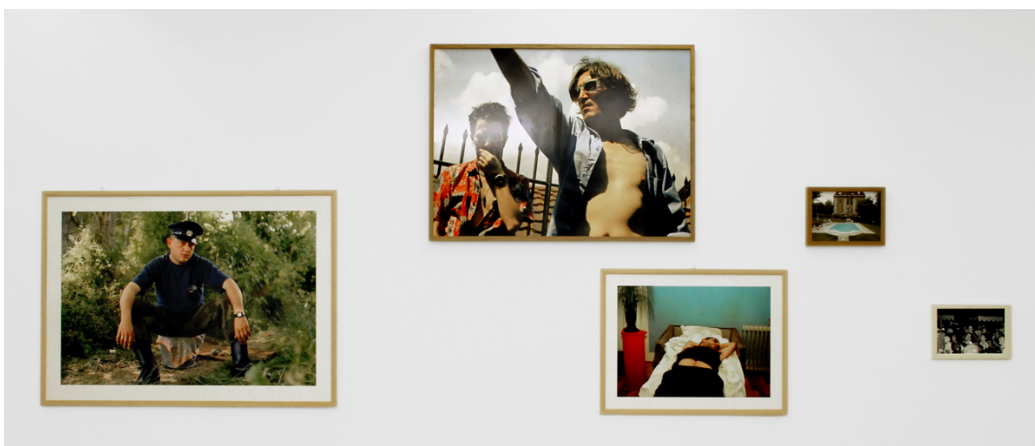


Figure 45: Ivan Petrović, From the series *Documents* and *Suspicious Behavior*, 1997-2008 (set-up view). Source: *Aftermath*

#### 4.5.2 A SYMPTOM IN THE ARCHIVE

There is something that defines the psychic structure of the new urban culture among young people across former Yugoslavia since the mid-1990s: it is a symptom of post-traumatic youth caught up in the circumstances beyond our control. To recall Griselda Pollock's warning from her introduction to the volume *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis*, the symptom of society-induced psychic disorder is not something to be pathologized on the individual level. The artists pertaining to post-Yugoslav post-traumatic youth were well aware of their "impossible" position, not being able neither to bring about any effective change nor to ignore the circumstances. As the critic Jerko Denegri pointed out, they could only accept their marginal and non-integrated position (Denegri 17). The strategic initiatives started to take place since the mid-1990s, and in the case of Serbia under the regime of Slobodan Milošević, this strategic positioning against the regime acquired the name of "cultural decontamination."<sup>94</sup>

While the official cultural system ignored the contemporary artistic practice, the artists and curators were trying to find the ways to reach to the public and to make their ideas approachable as possible. As Miroslav Karić, curator from the Independent Artists'

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<sup>94</sup> The notion "strategy" refers to the readiness to struggle for the space of existence and social responsibility for "enabling public engagement and stimulation of the political struggle for social cohesion, through intervening primarily in the fields of art, education and culture" (Center for cultural decontamination). Web. <<http://www.czkd.org>>. In the volume *Art at the End of the Century*, which collects the texts by the relevant art critics and art historians in Serbia, Branislav Dimitrijević suggests a theoretical contextualization of art based in (hetero)topography: "In the narrow context of Belgrade, the awareness of the significance of *locality mapping* has marked some new exhibition places like Cinema Rex and the Pavilion Veljković, and induced *creative spacing* of artistic undertakings." Under the management of Borka Pavićević the Pavilion Veljković became the Centre for Cultural Decontamination. The first "public" decontamination took place at the beginning of 1995.

Association *Remont* has explained, “the issues that the artists were faced with were neither dramatic repressions, nor outright prohibition of exhibitions, but other, perhaps even more dangerous forms of censorship” (38-42). The questions they repeatedly asked in their works might seem absurd or irrelevant at first but through a refusal to settle down for an answer, they turned out to be a direct challenge to the ignorance of the official system “cuddled in consumerist ideals and numerous stereotypes. (Janjić 99).

Among the most relevant features, and more specifically in the medium of photography, was the use of the archive to “question the issue of authenticity, especially in the manner in which the archive often serves to classify and unify concerns of disparate provenance, be it of race, ethnicity, or nationality” (Enwezor 46). Since the year 2000, an important role in promoting the young contemporary scene in Serbia was assumed by the aforementioned Independent Artists’ Association *Remont* that made one of the first overviews of the artistic production of the disturbing last decade of the twentieth century. In 2012, they initiated new project with the aim to provide an overview of the artistic scene after the year 2000. The starting exhibition of the project was titled *Photographers of the new generation*. It included the works of three artists, Ivan Petrović, Aleksandrija Ajduković and Katarina Radović, who have all created archives of strikingly ambivalent portrait-based works that belong to the area of so-called domestic photography. These are also “species of found photography”, as Mark Godfrey named it (90-119) in a “murky *sensorium*, blanketing the social and cultural landscape” (Enwezor 40). For example, the project titled *Photo-Album* by Ivan Petrović consists of re-photographed casual snapshots taken from a family photo-album, found in Kosovo at the time of war. Like other series by this artist, a found photographic album from Kosovo emphasizes the meeting between aesthetic and “forensic” dimension. With regard to Petrović’s photo-series, art historian Nikola Šuica has written in his text

“Punctuated Anxiety” that the “material deteriorability (double expositions, mistakes in framing, damaged emulsion after time spent on a rubbish heap or due to the effects of humidity)” speaks of a regional world which has arrived at the station of its own destruction.

Ivan Petrović is one of the artists-curators engaged also in editorial work, particularly related to the promotion of photography and its function at the limit between documentary and aesthetic. His works are based upon his personal trajectory: every-day life of students in Belgrade, scenes from his hometown of Kruševac, and his unwitting two-month participation in Kosovo as a soldier in 1999, during the period of NATO bombardment of Serbia. *Documents* (1997-2008) and *Exemplary Photographs* (2007-2010) are compilation of photographs from his archives documenting different aspects of life in Serbia during this period.

Instead of insisting on already formed series, Petrović leaves his archive open in a way that constantly places it in the center of attention. In *Documents*, a single photograph is treated like a changeable and inconsistent artifact of the archive and its meaning is coded in relation with other photographs . . . Although the presented photographs are documents of his visual experience, by a specific act of choice they become an inconstant medium of his archive. (Vasiljević 51).

The photographer’s positioning with regard to the situation is openly demonstrated and problematized anew each time he makes a new arrangement. The same photograph in two different displays is contextualized differently, which changes the way we are encountered by it. The thematic portfolio of Petrović’s *Documents* is characterized primarily by the ambivalence in any sense of identity, which he treats as a process of masquerading. The photographs titled “White Carnival” showing the customs of

masquerading in his hometown, as well as images of anniversaries, funerals, competitions and animal slaughter, can be read as a symptom of increased folklorization a small-town in the process of wider social disintegration. This folkloric repertoire is accompanied by a new consumerist repertoire laden with contradictions in the project *Exemplary Photographs* (2007-2010). However, these photographs are deprived of any particular data that would explain the depicted scenes. The author has stated that they do not refer to concrete events, but rather “to unpredictability of consequences which particular process may imply” in a concrete environment.

To work with the symptom through a visual aesthetics of transgression, so the thesis pursued in this dissertation, is deeply political and ethical, although the practices themselves do not always wave a political banner. Lacking a sense of social belonging, the post-traumatic youth embraced their symptom as a way of gaining control, and turning that incapability into a range of practices of resistance against the dominant modes of behavior and the degradation of value system. The generation of artists that grew up in times of constant political turbulence embarked on a mission to reassemble (which is the meaning of the word “remont”) their broken social reality anew out of its scattered fragments.

#### 4.5.3 JUXTAPOSITIONS

The *Aftermath* research project resulted in a series of travelling exhibitions across former Yugoslavia, and insisted upon the principle that the photographs are not to be displayed as isolated visual artefacts, but should be framed by critical discourses around the issues of cultural transformation from historical, anthropological, philosophical, psychological, and sociological perspectives. Moreover, the call for a re-politicized memory of the common socialist past was conjured up by the juxtaposition of images from the present and from the past. The juxtaposition of the present and the past is what makes history visible, according to Walter Benjamin, as the dialectical image. It transmits the disquiet of the past to the future, its haunting, repetitive aspect. The reconceptualization of documentary in terms of photography-based cultural symptomatology thus refers to a form of investigation on a given space and time from a perspective that takes into account the experiences that cannot be easily integrated into the ready-made contexts. The procedure of framing can have a function of an opening of a radical outside within “what-has-been,” pointing to what falls outside of the frame and into an unforeseen future.

In this regard, Didi-Huberman explains the meaning of an exhibition in reference to Theodor W. Adorno’s notion of the essay. In “The Essay as Form” Adorno defines essay as a way of thinking in images, a juxtaposition of images in such a way to bring thought to light. Finally, such thought lacks any definite conclusion, for it “corrects the isolated and accidental aspects of its insights by allowing them to multiply, confirm, and restrict themselves—whether in the essay’s proper progress or in its mosaic-like relation to other essays” (Adorno 159-164). This is what should define an exhibition, according to Didi-Huberman: an awareness of an infinite relation among images that encounter us

over and over again. The idea behind the curatorial research project *Aftermath* might be understood as a collective and continuous visual essay, which should not be considered finished with the completion of one particular project. The thought that such essay should bring to light concerns the aesthetic promise of photography to conjure up and work with the symptoms of our shared post-traumatic culture. The intention is not to recuperate the past as it has actually occurred but rather, following Benjamin, to encounter, in the turn of recollection, the past “as yet unlived” and to disclose its unrealized potentiality.

## CONCLUSION

To investigate contemporary art practices across former Yugoslavia necessarily involves facing a significant dilemma: which theoretical position to take up, considering that the local context is constantly being framed and reframed through different interpretative strategies, and thus reproduced anew with each new interpretation? Thesis on the *Aesthetics of Transgression and Its Strategies in Post-Yugoslav Art* has been pursued as a way of taking up a theoretical stance that would account for contradictions of the post-socialist condition, and post-Yugoslav case within it, characterized by its borderline position between the East and the West, as well as by the traumatic weight in the aftermath of wars, political-economic, social and cultural collapse. I have considered these topics through a psychoanalytic-aesthetic perspective that counteracts the simplistic narratives based on the totalized concept of identity, on democratic “normalization,” all-absorbing capitalism and pacifying multiculturalism. In the world of the multiplication of borders, the notion of transgression does not point to some area of free excess, but to the condition of continuous *dwelling in the border* and to the necessary mode of critical *border-thinking*. Understood in this way, the notion of transgression indicates the refusal of the simplistic solutions that tend to omit the ambivalences of such borderline condition and traumatic dimension of the historical process.

Upon this theoretical background, the contemporary art practices in former Yugoslavia have been defined as practices of cultural symptomatology. The notion of cultural symptomatology refers to a dynamic function related not only to the registration of the symptoms of cultural transformation, but also to the producing and fostering a borderline-type subjectivity as a form of resistance against the dominant models of identification. There is an opening of an ethical possibility of connecting with others on



the basis of shared traumatic experience within the historical process. This process also includes the changed concept of art in the age of cultural turns since the beginning of the 1990s, as well as the changed conditions of art production, representation and distribution of knowledge about it. In these conditions of changed global cultural landscape, there has been a renewed interest in the relation between aesthetics, ethics, and politics in contemporary art, as well as a new urgency around the questions of the production of subjectivity, the concepts of collectivity and the memory cultures. With regard to the complexity of these questions and the enormity of the research field, the aim of this dissertation has not been to provide an overarching insight into the post-Yugoslav art practices. My investigation has been focused upon the specific case studies at the crossing between the aesthetic and the documentary realm, and the research-curatorial projects dedicated to this crossing.

In the following, I would like to sum up the results of my investigation and their relation to the theoretical stance taken up by this thesis. The research has been conducted at the intersection between history, theory and practice. Historical analysis refers to a series of events that conditioned the economic-political, social and cultural transformation on the territory of former Yugoslavia since the mid-1980s. This contextual analysis has been framed by the consideration of the role of grand international exhibition-projects as the arena upon which, by the end of the 1990s, the construction of cultural identities and differences have been demonstrated, as well as the artistic positioning with regard to the power relations on the global art scene. The critical artistic and curatorial practices have been involved in the strategic dismantling of dominant social-cultural mechanisms of production, exchange and consumption of the values and meanings. Specifically, the artistic investigation into the traumatic consequences of wars, politics of hatred, new forms of cultural and economic

colonization, has risen the awareness around the oblivion of the recent past based on the antifascist struggle and Yugoslav principles of solidarity, brotherhood and unity. In my investigation, I have relied primarily on critical articulation and social-theoretical analyses by Yugoslav authors such as Alenka Zupančič, Boris Buden, Gal Kirn, Marina Gržinić, Igor Zabel, Ozren Pupovac, Rastko Močnik, Slavoj Žižek, Svetlana Slapšak, Ugo Vlaisavljević, and others. As primary resources of information have served the exhibition catalogues, magazine and newspapers (*Arkzin*, *Oslobodjenje*, *Prelom*, *Problemi*, *Reartikulacija*, *Vreme*, *Zarez* etc.), as well as online journals and platforms, indicated in the bibliography. The practical part of the investigation consisted in my active participation as a researcher, selector and curator within the curatorial-research project *Aftermath. Changing Cultural Landscape. Tendencies in Post-Yugoslav Photography*, organized by Photon Center for Contemporary Photography Ljubljana, 2012-2014. Through a series of travelling exhibitions and events, this project set forth an in-depth, although necessarily only partial, overview of the topics that can serve as a basis for further research.

I have considered the photography-based works as symptoms testifying on the interconnection between personal and collective memory, with a special focus upon the case of wartime Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The notion of the symptom points to the irregularity within the politics of memory and the culture of oblivion, as well as to the contradictions of living and working in the wartime and post-war conditions. This consideration is related to the thesis on political significance of psychoanalysis as critical theory with regard to the opening of new ethical possibilities that can supervene from war and post-war experiences. The mode of transmission of these possibilities through the photographic image is defined as an aesthetics of transgression. Visual aesthetics of transgression is involved into the process of production of subjectivity and connectivity

to others whose lives, as well as their death and their suffering, are from the start intertwined with our own lives. The possibilities of such transmission through the photographic image are theorized in different ways, drawing from Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin, by contemporary thinkers such as Ariella Azoulay, Bracha Ettinger, Diarmuid Costello, George Didi-Huberman, Griselda Pollock, Jae Emerling, Judith Butler, Susan Buck-Morss, Ulrich Baer. The reconsideration of the role of aesthetics within the work of visual culture and image theory relates to the critical non-reconciliatory thinking in the era of the explosion of visual media, and the overall anaestheticization of perception at the turn of the century. Visual aesthetics of transgression insists on our sensible encounter with the images that have the power to “symptomize” the visible world so that the hidden dynamic of events might be apprehended. This power lies in the juxtaposition of contradictory meanings without opportunity for synthesis or resolution, which is a theoretical stance taken up by Walter Benjamin in the concept of the dialectical image, and by George Didi Huberman in his symptom-based theory of images. What has been changed by this approach is a way of asking question. Instead of asking the iconological question what we can know about images, the symptomatological question is rather what we *cannot* know about them, but what still can affect us through the apprehension of our own vulnerability. As Sybille Krämer has further discussed, this theoretization leads towards an advanced understanding of the image-viewer relation, in which we encounter images in an analogy to human encounter, not as framed objects, but as live presence and subjects of framing.

The status of artistic practice as cultural symptomatology, and the status of the photographic image as a symptom, have necessitated a re-problematization of the notion of documentary, as well as the conventions of authenticity, universality, and truth-claims related to the underlying problems of the photographic culture from the beginning of the

twentieth to the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is important to emphasize that the photographic image never stands alone, but is a result of a sensible encounter among many subjectivities, past and present, and is always related to other images, texts and bodies. The history is written upon the bodies and the environments, and the photographic practice at the crossing between the aesthetic and the documentary realm has a function to capture, translate and transmit its symptoms, taking into account the psychoanalytic issues of ambiguity and overdetermination. The role of the photographic image is, on one hand, in soliciting an ethico-political response able to account for contradictions and excess in the totality of meaning, and on the other, in providing a form of remembrance precisely at the point of breakdown in memory.

A case study in this dissertation concerns a corpus of photographic series that in different ways have fulfilled such function in the context of former Yugoslavia. There are three main tendencies: typological and topographic tendency (1) based in the usage of straight photography in order to register certain phenomena of post-socialism and the aftermath of disintegration of Yugoslavia; the reinterpretation of the landscape genre (2) in order to deal with the issue of the (un)representability of trauma—"the framing of an absence," as Ulrich Baer defined such photography— supported by in-depth documentary research that surrounds the photographic landscape; and the archivist tendency (3) based in the usage of found images in private and family archives, in the attempt to open up a performative and affective dimension of the archive. Finally, the role of a photographic exhibition has been addressed as a medium of triggering a social dialogue around the common issues across the changed cultural landscape of former Yugoslavia. This analysis also demonstrated that there is a certain form of "social contract of photography" (Azoulay) that unites this cultural landscape: starting with the work on documenting the social revolt in the 1980s, and its instrumentalization for the

purposes of nationalistic projects, across the devastated landscape of the 1990s, and the documentation of the architectural remnants of the once functional infrastructure, made obsolete in a new capital-ridden world, to the work of younger generation of photographers who problematize the recent historical events from a position of personal experience of growing up and living in the constant conditions of war, poverty and social instability.

The parameters of criticality and ambiguity of the image, following the dictum of Walter Benjamin, are crucial for all these tendencies. An important characteristic of post-Yugoslav art can be discerned from the above: a definition of social commitment based not so much in the critique of institutions or in the belief of direct political efficacy of the artistic engagement, as in taking responsibility for opening up new modes of subjectivity, perception and recollection in times of social and cultural collapse. This thesis insists on the *aesthetic promise* and the *ethical demand* to work with the symptoms through which such practices counteract the media exploitation of disturbing images, as the scenes of destruction and decay became the topic of daily reportages, including those about the disintegration of Yugoslavia and subsequent wars and transition processes. Instead of making a passing document in the media-world saturated with shocking images, the aim of cultural symptomatology has been to open up a space of critical memory and investigation into the contradictions of contemporary condition. A case of post-Yugoslav photography in relation to other practices of cultural symptomatology, is a research trajectory to be further pursued and elaborated in more depth in the future.

## SCHLUSSBEMERKUNG

Die Untersuchung zeitgenössischer künstlerischer Praktiken im ehemaligen Jugoslawien bedeutet zugleich, sich einem wichtigen Dilemma zu stellen: welche theoretische Haltung ist einzunehmen, angesichts der Tatsache, dass der lokale Kontext durch unterschiedliche Deutungsstrategien einer jeden neuen Interpretation stets neu definiert wird? Eine These in Bezug auf die *Ästhetik der Transgression und ihre Strategien in der postjugoslawischen Kunst* aufzustellen, bedeutet daher, eine theoretische Haltung einzunehmen, die einerseits den postjugoslawischen Fall als eine Grenzposition zwischen Ost und West versteht, andererseits die Widersprüche der postsozialistischen Situation und das Kriegstrauma, sowie den politisch-ökonomischen, sozialen oder kulturellen Zusammenbruch berücksichtigt. Ich habe diese Themen aus der psychoanalytisch-ästhetischen Perspektive betrachtet, die den simplifizierenden Narrativen opponiert, welche auf den totalisierenden Identitätskonzepten, demokratischer „Normalisierung“, dem alles vereinnahmenden Kapitalismus und beschwichtigendem Multikulturalismus beruhen. In einer Welt der Multiplikation von Grenzen zielt die Idee der Transgression nicht auf eine Sphäre des freien Zugangs, sondern auf den Umstand des kontinuierlichen *in-der-Grenze-Verbleibens* und den notwendigen Modus der *kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit Grenzen*. Auf diese Weise verstanden, impliziert die Idee der Transgression die Ablehnung simplifizierender Lösungen, welche die Ambivalenzen eines solchen Grenzzustandes und die traumatische Dimension dieses historischen Prozesses vernachlässigen oder sogar gänzlich auslassen.

Vor diesem theoretischen Hintergrund lassen sich gegenwärtige Kunstpraktiken im ehemaligen Jugoslawien als Praktiken der kulturellen Symptomatologie definieren. Der Begriff der kulturellen Symptomatologie bezieht sich auf eine dynamische Funktion, die sich nicht nur auf die Wahrnehmung der Symptome der kulturellen Transformation

bezieht, sondern auch auf die Erzeugung und Förderung einer *Borderline*-Subjektivität als einer Form des Widerstands gegen die dominierenden Identifikationsmodelle. Dies eröffnet eine ethische Möglichkeit der Verknüpfung mit Anderen auf Grundlage der gemeinsamen traumatischen Erfahrung innerhalb des historischen Prozesses. Dieser Prozess umfasst auch das veränderte Kunstverständnis im Zeitalter der kulturellen Wende seit Beginn der 1990er Jahre sowie die veränderten Bedingungen von Kunstproduktion, Repräsentation und Vermittlung von Wissen.

Unter diesen Bedingungen der veränderten globalen Kulturlandschaft hat sich ein neues Interesse an dem Verhältnis von Ästhetik, Ethik und Politik in der zeitgenössischen Kunst etabliert. Hinzu kommt eine neue Dringlichkeit um Fragen der Subjektivitätsproduktion, der Konzepte von Kollektivität und der Gedächtniskulturen. Hinsichtlich der Komplexität dieser Fragen und der Größe des Forschungsfeldes war das Ziel dieses Dissertationsprojektes nicht, einen übergreifenden Einblick in die postjugoslawischen Kunstpraktiken zu geben. Vielmehr konzentriert sich meine Untersuchung auf die konkreten Fallstudien an der Schnittstelle zwischen dem ästhetischen und dem dokumentarischen Bereich und die forschungsorientierten kuratorischen Projekte, die sich dieser Schnittstelle widmen.

Im Folgenden möchte ich die Ergebnisse meiner Untersuchung und ihr Verhältnis zu der theoretischen Position, die ich einnehme, zusammenfassen. Die Recherche wurde an der Schnittstelle von Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis durchgeführt. Die historische Analyse bezieht sich auf eine Reihe von Ereignissen, die die wirtschaftlich-politische, soziale und kulturelle Transformation auf dem Territorium des ehemaligen Jugoslawien seit Mitte der 1980er Jahre bedingten. Diese kontextualisierende Analyse wurde unter der Berücksichtigung der Rolle, die die großen internationalen Ausstellungsprojekte spielten, durchgeführt, weil sie bis Ende der 1990er Jahre als eine Plattform zur

Konstruktion kultureller Identitäten und Unterschiede sowie die künstlerische Positionierung zu den Machtverhältnissen in der globalen Kunstszene dienten. Die kritischen künstlerischen und kuratorischen Praktiken waren Teil der strategischen Demontage von dominanten soziokulturellen Mechanismen der Produktion, des Austauschs und des Konsums der Werte- und Bedeutungskonstruktionen. Insbesondere die künstlerischen Untersuchungen zu den traumatischen Folgen von Krieg, einer Politik des Hasses, neuen Formen der kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Kolonisierung führte zu der Erkenntnis, die jüngste Vergangenheit, die auf der Grundlage des antifaschistischen Kampfes und den jugoslawischen Prinzipien von Solidarität, Brüderlichkeit und Einheit basierte, gerate in Vergessenheit. In meiner Untersuchung beziehe ich mich in erster Linie auf kritische Positionen und sozialtheoretische Analysen von jugoslawischen Autor\_innen, unter anderen Alenka Zupančič, Boris Buden, Gal Kirn, Igor Zabel, Marina Gržinić, Ozren Pupovac, Rastko Močnik, Slavoj Žižek, Svetlana Slapšak, Ugo Vlaisavljević. Als primäre Informationsquellen dienten die Kataloge, Zeitungen und Zeitschriften (*Arkzin, Oslobodjenje, Problemi, Reartikulacija, Prelom, Vreme, Zarez* etc.), Online-Zeitschriften und Web-Plattformen, die in der Bibliografie aufgelistet sind. Der praktische Teil der Untersuchung bestand in meiner aktiven Teilnahme als Wissenschaftlerin und Kuratorin im Rahmen des kuratorischen Forschungsprojekts *Aftermath. Changing Cultural Landscape. Tendencies in Post-Yugoslav Photography*, das vom Photon Center for Contemporary Photography Ljubljana zwischen 2012 und 2014 organisiert und durchgeführt wurde. Dieses Projekt hat mit einer ganzen Reihe von Ausstellungen und Veranstaltungen eine wichtige Grundlage für weitere Forschungen geschaffen, obwohl auch hier betont werden muss, dass es sich um einen zwangsläufig unvollständigen Einblick in die gegenwärtige Kunstpraxis handelt.



Ich habe die fotografischen Arbeiten als Symptome betrachtet, die von einer Verbindung der persönlichen und der kollektiven Erinnerung zeugen und habe mich dabei auf den Krieg in Sarajevo konzentriert. Der Begriff des Symptoms weist auf die Unregelmäßigkeit in der Erinnerungspolitik und der Kultur des Vergessens sowie auf die Widersprüche von Leben und Arbeit in Kriegs- und Nachkriegssituationen hin. Diese Betrachtung bezieht sich auf die These einer politischen Bedeutung der Psychoanalyse als kritischer Theorie hinsichtlich der Erschließung von neuen ethischen Möglichkeiten, die sich aufgrund von Kriegs- und Nachkriegserfahrungen ergeben können. Der Übertragungsmodus dieser Möglichkeiten durch das fotografische Bild lässt sich als Ästhetik der Transgression definieren. Die visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression ist ein Teil des Prozesses der Subjektivitätsproduktion und der Verbundenheit zu anderen, deren Leben, wie auch Tod und Leiden von Anfang an mit unserem eigenen Leben verwoben sind. Die Möglichkeiten einer solchen Übertragung durch das fotografische Bild wurden auf verschiedene Weise theoretisch betrachtet, von Hannah Arendt und Walter Benjamin, aber auch von zeitgenössischen Denker\_innen und Philosoph\_innen wie Ariella Azoulay, Bracha Ettinger, Diarmuid Costello, George Didi-Huberman, Griselda Pollock, Jae Emerling, Judith Butler, Susan Buck-Morss, Ulrich Baer,.

Die Verhandlung der Rolle der Ästhetik in den Kultur- und Bildwissenschaften steht in Zusammenhang mit dem kritischen Denken in Zeiten der Omnipräsenz visueller Medien und der allgemeinen Anästhetisierung der Wahrnehmung um die Jahrhundertwende. Visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression besteht darauf, dass wir den Bildern, die eine sichtbare Welt so „symptomatisieren“ können, dass die verborgene Dynamik der Ereignisse begreifbar wird, sensibel begegnen. Deren Macht liegt in der Gegenüberstellung widersprüchlicher Bedeutungen ohne die Möglichkeit der Synthese oder Auflösung – eine theoretische Position, die Walter Benjamin in seinem Konzept des

dialektischen Bildes und George Didi-Huberman in seiner auf Symptom basierenden Bildtheorie einnehmen. Was durch diesen Ansatz verändert wurde, ist die Art und Weise, wie man die Fragen stellt. Anstatt die ikonologische Frage zu stellen, was wir über Bilder wissen können, richtet sich die symptomatologische Frage eher nach dem, was wir *nicht* über sie wissen können, was uns aber durch das Begreifen unserer eigenen Verletzbarkeit durchaus beeinflussen kann. Wie Sybille Krämer weiter erörtert hat, führt diese Theoretisierung zu einem fortgeschrittenen Verständnis des Verhältnisses zwischen Bild und Betrachter\_in, wobei wir den Bildern in einer Analogie zu den Menschen begegnen; sie nicht weiter als eingerahmte Objekte, sondern als lebendige Gegenwart verstehen.

Der Status der künstlerischen Praxis als kulturelle Symptomatologie und der Status des fotografischen Bildes als Symptom haben eine Neuproblematisierung des Begriffs des Dokumentarischen sowie der Konventionen um Authentizität, Universalität und Wahrheitsansprüche erfordert, die der Kultur der Fotografie von Anfang des 20. bis Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts zugrunde liegen. Es ist wichtig zu betonen, dass das fotografische Bild niemals alleine steht, sondern das Ergebnis einer sensiblen Begegnung zwischen vielen Subjektivitäten, Vergangenheit und Gegenwart darstellt und immer mit anderen Bildern, Texten und Körpern zusammenhängt. Die Geschichte ist in die Körper und Umgebungen hineingeschrieben und die fotografische Praxis, an der Schnittstelle des Ästhetischen und des Dokumentarischen hat die Funktion, die Symptome zu erfassen, zu übersetzen und zu übertragen, wobei die psychoanalytischen Fragen der Mehrdeutigkeit und Überdeterminierung berücksichtigt werden müssen. Die Rolle des fotografischen Bildes besteht einerseits darin, ethisch-politische Fragen aufzuwerfen, die in der Lage sind, die Widersprüche und die Exzesse in der semantischen Totalität

aufzudecken, andererseits im Moment des Zusammenbruchs der Erinnerung, eine Form des Gedenkens zu bieten.

Die Fallstudie in dieser Dissertation widmet sich dem Korpus, bestehend aus einer Serie von Fotografien, die eine solche Funktion im Kontext des ehemaligen Jugoslawien auf unterschiedliche Weise erfüllt haben. Dabei sind drei Hauptströmungen auszumachen: (1) die typologische und topografische Tendenz, die Fotografie verwendet, um bestimmte Phänomene des Postsozialismus und die Folgen des Zerfalls von Jugoslawien zu dokumentieren; (2) die Neudeutung des Genres Landschaftsfotografie, die sich dem Problem (der Unmöglichkeit) der Darstellbarkeit von Trauma nähert – Ulrich Baer bezeichnete diese Art von Fotografie als „the framing of the absence“ –, begleitet von umfassenden dokumentarischen Recherchen über die fotografierte Landschaft; und (3) die archivarische Tendenz, die auf im privaten und familiären Umfeld gefundenes Material (*found image*) zurückgreift, um die performative und affektierende Dimension des Archivs zu erschließen. Schließlich wurde die Rolle einer fotografischen Ausstellung als Medium der Auslösung (*triggering*) eines gesellschaftlichen Dialogs über gemeinsame Themen in der veränderten Kulturlandschaft des ehemaligen Jugoslawiens behandelt. Diese Analyse zeigte, dass es eine bestimmte Form von „Gesellschaftsvertrag durch die Fotografie“ (Azoulay) gibt, der diese Kulturlandschaft vereint: angefangen bei der Dokumentation der gesellschaftlichen Revolte in den 1980er Jahren und deren Instrumentalisierung für die Zwecke nationalistischer Projekte, über das Festhalten der verwüsteten Landschaften der 1990er Jahre und die Dokumentation der architektonischen Ruinen einer ehemals funktionierenden Infrastruktur, die in einer vom Kapital beherrschten Welt obsolet wurde, hin zu den Arbeiten der jungen Generation von Fotograf\_innen, die die historischen Ereignisse aus einer persönlichen Perspektive heraus problematisieren,

geprägt von den Erfahrungen des Aufwachsens und Lebens in einem permanenten Zustand des Krieges, der Armut und sozialer Instabilität, die der Zerfall Jugoslawiens verursacht hat.

Die Parameter der Kritik und Ambivalenz, die dem Diktum Walter Benjamins folgen, sind für diese Tendenzen von entscheidender Bedeutung. Ein wichtiges Merkmal der postjugoslawischen Kunst lässt sich aus dem oben genannten erkennen: die Definition des gesellschaftlichen Engagements basiert nicht so sehr auf der Kritik der Institutionen oder dem Glauben an die direkte politische Wirksamkeit des künstlerischen Aktivismus, sondern auf der Übernahme der Verantwortung für die Erschließung neuer Formen von Subjektivität, Wahrnehmung und Verständnis in Zeiten des sozialen und kulturellen Zusammenbruchs. Meine These insistiert auf dem *ästhetischen Versprechen* und der *ethischen Forderung*, durch welche diese Praktiken einer medialen Ausbeutung von verstörenden Bildern entgegenwirken können, da die Szenen der Zerstörung und des Zerfalls zum Thema der täglichen Reportagen wurden, auch über den Zerfall Jugoslawiens und die darauffolgenden Kriegs- und Transformationsprozesse hinaus. Anstatt der Schaffung eines abschließenden Dokumentes in einer von schockierenden Bildern übersättigten Medienwelt, zielt die kulturelle Symptomatologie auf die Erweiterung des Raumes für kritische Erinnerungsarbeit und Untersuchung der Widersprüche der Gegenwartssituation. Die Fallstudie der postjugoslawischen auf Fotografie basierenden Praktiken und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen Praktiken der kulturellen Symptomatologie ist ein Forschungsschwerpunkt, der in Zukunft vertieft und weiterentwickelt werden soll.



## APPENDIX: ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

**Bajević, Maja:** Born 1967 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. She graduated at the Academy of Fine Art in Sarajevo and finished her master studies at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris. She has been teaching at the MA studies of L'Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Lyon; Università luav di Venezia, and MA studies Bauhaus University, Weimar. She participated in numerous collective exhibitions and biennials, including Venice biennial (2003, 2015). Held solo exhibitions at PS1, MoMA, New York (2004), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2005), National gallery B-H, Ars Aevi (2006), Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice (2008), Reina Sofia, Madrid (2011), DAAD Gallery, Berlin (2012), The James Gallery, CUNY, New York (2012-13), Galerie Michel Rein, Paris (2014), Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich (2017).

<[www.majabajevic.com](http://www.majabajevic.com)>

**Cvjetanović, Boris:** Born 1953 in Zagreb, Croatia. He graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Zagreb, in 1976. From 1976 to 1984, he worked as a sculptor conservationist at the Croatian Conservation Institute. He began to pursue photography professionally in 1981 working for a university magazine *Studentski list* where he became the photography editor in 1987. In 2003 he represented Croatia at the 50th Venice Biennale (together with Ana Opalic). His photographs belong to several major international art collections: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb; Gallery Dante Marino Cettina, Umag; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka; Art Gallery in Split; National Museum Zadar – Art Gallery; Croatian History Museum, Zagreb and in several private collections.

<<http://croatian-photography.com/author/boris-cvjetanovic/>>

**Dakić, Danica:** Born 1962 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Her art practice extends from video and film to photography and installation. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Sarajevo, the Faculty of Fine Arts, Belgrade, and the Academy of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf. Her work has been widely exhibited internationally. She participated in many group exhibitions including documenta 12, Kassel (2007), Istanbul Biennial (2003, 2009), Liverpool Biennial (2010), Sidney Biennial (2010), and took part at the Bienal de Sao Paolo (2014, 2015). Her recent solo exhibitions include presentations at the Lehmbruck Museum Duisburg (2017), Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt (2013), Hammer Museum Los Angeles (2011), Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2011). She is professor at the Bauhaus University Weimar since 2011. Lives in Düsseldorf, Weimar and Sarajevo.

<[www.danicadakic.com](http://www.danicadakic.com)>

**Đerković, Andrej:** Born 1971 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is a member of International Federation of Photographic art (FIAP), member of Swiss Association of Photographic art (PHOTO SUISSE); member of Federazione Italiana Associazioni Fotografiche (FIAF); member of The Association of Applied artists and designers of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ULUPUBIH), member of Belfast Exposed Photography Community Group. His photographs and works were published in British Journal of Photography, Le Monde, Liberation, La Stampa, La Repubblica, Liberazione, Exibart, Marianne, Berner Woche, Avui, Politis, Le Courrier, La Depeche, Le Dauphine Libere, Le Temps, COTE Magazine, Radikal, Hurriyet, Tages Anzieger, Mladina, Zarez, Feral Tribune, Vijenac, Vjesnik, Pobjeda, Republika, Vijesti, Utrinski Vesnik, Dani, Slobodna Bosna, Odjek, KUN, Gracija, etc. Individual exhibitions held in Palestine, Northern Ireland, Montenegro, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Serbia, France, Georgia, Croatia,

England, Macedonia, Turkey, Slovenia, Belgium, Germany and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Lives and works in Sarajevo and Geneva.

<<http://www.andrej-djerkovic.com>>

**Gafić, Ziyah:** Born 1980 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. He graduated in Comparative literature. Since 1999 he has been travelling extensively and covered major events in more than forty countries. His work was awarded the First and Second Prize at World Press Photo (2002), the Kodak annual award for young reporters at the festival Visa pour l'image Perpignan (2002), the Grand Prix Discovery of the Year at Les Rencontres du photographie Arles (2003), the Giacomelli Memorial Fund Award (2005), and nominated for UNICEF photographer of the year in 2006. He exhibited at relevant galleries and photo festivals, such as Fovea Editions New York, Oude Kerk Amsterdam, Tom Blau Gallery London, Grazia Neri Gallery Milano. He regularly publishes his work in some of the leading publications such as Amica, La republica, Time, Tank, Telegraph magazine, Newsweek, L'Espresso..

<<http://www.ziyahgafic.ba/photo.php>>

**Hadžifejzović, Jusuf:** Born 1956 in Prijepolje, Montenegro. He graduated in 1976 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Serbia, and finished his postgraduate studies in 1982 at the State Art Academy in Düsseldorf, Germany. He was one of the founders of *Yugoslav Documenta* and the collection of contemporary art *Ars Aevi* in Sarajevo. In 2009 he founded Charlama Depot Gallery of Contemporary Art in Sarajevo and was the main organized of *SubDocumenta* in Sarajevo. He exhibited in many solo and collective exhibitions across the world, including: Hans Memling Museum Brugge, Belgium, Denis Anderson Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium, Moderna galerija Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1<sup>st</sup> Johannesburg Biennale, South Africa, Kunst-Werke Berlin,



Germany, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna, Austria, Tretyakov Gallery Moscow, Russia, Pavilion of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Neue Galerie Graz, Austria, Ludwig Museum Budapest, Hungary, Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin, Germany.

<<https://hadzifejzovicjusuf.wordpress.com>>

**Hadžić, Kemal:** Born 1947 in Ključ, Bosnia and Herzegovina. After graduating from university in Banja Luka, Hadžić moved to Sarajevo and taught high school science. It was there that he renewed his childhood interest in photography. Since 1970 he was involved in various photo clubs in Sarajevo and began taking his own pictures again, working for both commercial and artistic venues. When the war began in Bosnia, Hadžić joined the army, but he continued to take pictures. He left Bosnia in 1995 and currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

**Hoxha, Majlinda:** Born 1984 in Prishtina, Kosovo. She holds a BFA in photography from Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design and a MFA from the Elam School of Fine Art at Auckland University. Hoxha is the deputy photo editor and photographer at *Kosovo 2.0* magazine where her work is regularly published. Her Family Portrait #1 was displayed in 2013 at The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. She is a winner of Young Visual Artist Award 2013, a residency at ISCP New York City.

**Jušić, Adela:** Born 1982 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Graduated from the Academy of Fine Art in Sarajevo, holds a master degree in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe from Sarajevo and Bologna University. She is cofounder of the Association for Culture and Art *Crvena*. She exhibited solo and in many collective international exhibitions including *Memory Lane* (Galerie du jour agnes b., Paris, France); *IV Moscow International Biennale for Young Art* (Russia);

*Conflict: Art and War* (Contemporary Art Society, London), *Good Girls\_Memory, Desire, Power* (MNAC Bucharest, Romania); *Image Counter Image* (Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany); *Manifesta 8* (Murcia, Spain). She has been awarded ZVONO award (2010), Henkel Young Artists Prize CEE (2011) and 54th October Salon Special Award (2013). Lives and works in Sarajevo.

<[www.adelajusic.wordpress.com](http://www.adelajusic.wordpress.com)>

**Kamerić, Šejla:** Born 1976 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. She completed her studies at the Academy of Fine Art in Sarajevo. Solo exhibitions at the Contemporary art center Vilnius, Galerie Tanja Wagner Berlin, Museum of contemporary art Belgrade, Museum of contemporary art Zagreb, Kunsthhaus Graz, Museum of modern art Ljubljana, Sharjah Art Museum, Kosova Art Gallery Prishtina, MACBA Barcelona, ArtAngel London, Sarajevo Film Festival, DAAD Galerie Berlin etc. Participated in numerous group exhibitions, film festivals and art biennials, including Gwangju Biennial Korea, Art Bruxelles 2012, Marrakesh Biennial, Art Fair Paris. She is a holder of several awards. Lives and works in Berlin and Sarajevo.

<[www.sejla-kameric.com](http://www.sejla-kameric.com)>

**Kolbas, Silvestar:** Born 1956 in Petrovci near Vukovar, Croatia. He is a film and TV cinematographer and director. He graduated in Film and TV Cinematography from the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, in 1982. Until 1985, he worked as a freelance photographer for magazines and books, and documented the Croatian domestic crafts. From 1985 to 1996 he was employed at the Croatian Television as a cinematographer, and continues to work as a freelance cinematographer. He was the co-founder and co-owner of the only cinema Crvena Zvijezda (Red Star) in the war-torn Vinkovci (1994 – 1998). He made several feature films, short films and TV-

films, TV-series and a number of documentary films, under TV or independent productions (Factum, etc.). In movies where he engages in self-reflection, he uses his own photography and examines the medium of photography. He directed documentary movies: All about Eve (2003), 20 days on Tibet, War Reporter (2011), Self-portrait V2.1 (2010) and The Cinema Crvena Zvezda (2014).

<<http://croatian-photography.com/en/author/silvestar-kolbas/>>

**Kovačević, Milomir Strašni:** Born 1961 in Čajniče, Bosnia-Herzegovina. He started doing photography at the age of 17 within photo-club Cedus in Sarajevo. He has been a member of the Association of Professional Journalists since 1986, and a member of the photography section of the Artists' Association of Bosnia-Herzegovina since 1989. Before and during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, he made numerous series as a comprehensive chronicle of daily life. His first photographic exhibition was in Sarajevo gallery Collegium artisticu in 1993. Since then, he has published and exhibited extensively in solo and group exhibitions. He lives and works in Paris.

<<http://www.milomirkovacevic.info>>

**Krstanović, Danilo:** Born 1951 and died 2013 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Born into a family of photographers, Krstanović took up the trade and began his career as a sports photographer for Sarajevo's daily newspaper *Oslobođenje*. Krstanović continued to work throughout the war, documenting the destruction of his city. In 1991, while still working for *Oslobođenje*, he began shooting pictures for Reuters News Agency.

**Krajnc, Borut:** Born 1964 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Since 1990 has been working as documentary photographer, photojournalist of the weekly magazine *Mladina*. In his work, he covers social and political processes in Slovenia. He is co-author of the

book *Re:Start*, published by Kino Šiška Centre for Urban Culture Ljubljana in 2009.

He was winner of the category People/Story at Slovenia Press Photo in 2009.

[<http://photon.si/en/archiv/borut-krajnc-en/>](http://photon.si/en/archiv/borut-krajnc-en/)

**Mrdenović, Bojan:** Born 1987 in Virovitica, Croatia. He graduated in Art History and Information Sciences from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, in 2011. In 2012, he graduated in Cinematography from the Academy of Dramatic Art, Zagreb. He is a member of the Croatian Association of Artists and the Croatian Society of Film Workers.

[<http://croatian-photography.com/en/author/bojan-mrdenovic-2/>](http://croatian-photography.com/en/author/bojan-mrdenovic-2/)

**Nikšić, Damir:** Born 1970 in Brezovo polje near Brčko, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Sarajevo, Milan and Bologna. Graduated from the Academy of Fine Art Sarajevo, Department of Painting. He obtained MA degree in fine arts and art history from the University of Arizona, USA. He has been teaching at the Northwestern University in Evanston near Chicago, USA. His numerous international exhibitions include the participation at Venice Biennial 2003. Lives and works in Sarajevo.

**Opalić, Ana:** Born 1972 in Dubrovnik. She graduated in TV and film cinematography from the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. She directed a documentary film “Once Again”, 2014 (together with Noah Pintarić). She was the cinematographer of a documentary film “Family Meals” (dir. Dana Budisavljević). In 2003, she represented Croatia at the 50th Venice Biennale (together with Boris Cvjetanović). In 2008, she won the second prize at the T-HT award@msu.hr competition. Her photographs and videos are in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Dubrovnik Art Gallery, Art Gallery in Split and in several private collections. She works in photography and video. She is the founder of the web portal Contemporary

Croatian Photography.

<[www.croatian-photography.com](http://www.croatian-photography.com)>.

<[www.anaopalic.com](http://www.anaopalic.com)>

**Petković, Darije:** Born 1974 in Zagreb, Croatia. He graduated in Cinematography from the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb, in 1999. During his studies, he began working as a professional photographer in printed media. Since 2005, he is employed as an assistant professor at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. He is active in the field of socially engaged photography.

<<http://croatian-photography.com/en/author/darije-petkovic-2/>>

**Petrović, Ivan:** Born 1973 in Kruševac, Serbia. He graduated from the Photography Department at the Academy of Arts “BK” in Belgrade, in 2002. His photographic work features a distinctive documentary approach, which also includes an extended use of ready-made material (photographs developed from films found in the street). By reusing his previous work and relating it to his new work, he presents his photographic projects as a self-curated form. He received a scholarship from KulturKontakt Vienna for 2004, a Young Visual Artist Award – Residency at ISCP Gallery New York (2008) and a Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos award (2008). He is founder and editor of the Center for Photography (with Mihailo Vasiljević), an independent non-profit organization established in Belgrade in 2011.

<[www.ivanpetrovic.info](http://www.ivanpetrovic.info)>

**Pungerčar, Marija Mojca:** Born in Novo Mesto, Slovenia. Lives and works in Ljubljana. A former fashion designer (1983 -1987), she holds a BFA in painting from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana (1989) and an MFA in new genres from the San Francisco Art Institute (2001). For one semester she has also studied painting as a guest student at the Academy at the College of Applied Arts in Vienna

(1992-93). Since 1991 she works as an artist freelancer. Since 2004 she is the founding member of the Trivia Art (KUD Trivia). Her awards include an Austrian Academic Exchange Scholarship, an ArtsLink Fellowship and a Fulbright Scholarship. She works as a freelance artist (video, photography, performance, installation, theatre costumes design). Her work is marked by a strong social engagement, critically rethinking consumerist culture and underscoring issues of locality and community.

<<http://www.3via.org/index.php?htm=mojca>>

**Samarah, Tarik:** Born 1965 in Zagreb, Croatia. He spent his childhood in Ljubuški.

Lives and works in Sarajevo. His interests mainly reside in the field of artistic and documentary photography, and his most significant project is “Srebrenica-genocide in the heart of Europe,” a series of black-and-white photographs documenting the aftermath of Srebrenica. He is author of the monograph *Srebrenica*, and his photographs have been exhibited in many art galleries, museum and public spaces, both independently and in collective exhibitions, such as: U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., UN Headquarters New York, Galerie du jour Paris, Dutch Parliament in Hague, Memorial Centre Westerbork, Pordenone Arte Contemporanea Italy, Norwegian Center for the Study of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities Oslo, and many others. He received an Award of the International Peace Center “Freedom,” Grand-Prix Award for the Applied Art for 2005, Award of the Book Fair Ljubljana, and many other recognitions. Today his photographs form the permanent exhibit in Memorial Gallery 11/07/95 in Sarajevo.

<<http://tariksamarah.com>>

**Suljević, Alma:** Born 1963 in Kakanj. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Art in Sarajevo, Department of Sculpture, and from the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo.

She was dedicated to rising awareness about the danger of minefields and actively participated in de-mining. She has exhibited solo and in numerous international collective exhibitions, including Valencia Biennial 2001, *In den Schluchten des Balkans* (Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel, 2003), *Blood and Honey-The Future's in the Balkans* (*Act of Resistance* – San Sebastian Biennial, *Memory Lane* (Galerie du jour agnes b., Paris, France, 2014). She is a professor at the Academy of Fine Art in Sarajevo.

<<http://scca.ba/exhibitions/performances/4th-entity-markale-alma-suljevic/>>

**Šerić, Nebojša:** Born 1968 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo from 1989 to the outbreak of war in 1992. In 1999 he moved to Amsterdam to attend the Rijksakademie, and international two-year artist residency and studio program. His works have been exhibited in museums and art spaces worldwide, including Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville Paris; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Kunsthalle Bern; Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien; Deutsches Hygiene Museum, Dresden; Kunstmuseum Boshum; De Appel, Amsterdam; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Creative Time, New York City; Exit Art, New York City; Dumbo Arts Center, New York City; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; The 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial; MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, and P.S. 1, New York City.

**Toševski, Igor:** Born 1963 in Skopje, Macedonia. He graduated from Kuvataide Academy in Helsinki, in 1988. He is a founder and member of various artistic groups in Macedonia since the end of the 1970s, including the group Zero. Since the 1990s his work is more concerned with social and political issues, starting with Dossier 96, which was presented at the exhibition *After the Wall* (1999/2000). His project *Territories*, examining the border between art and non-art, and linguistic

aspects of national identity, was first presented in Skopje in 2004. His work is featured in many studies on contemporary art in Eastern Europe, including *Primary Documents*.

<<http://toshevski.weebly.com>>

**Urban, Pavo:** Born 1968, died 1991 in Dubrovnik, Croatia. He was a member of photo-club “Marin Getaldić” in Dubrovnik. He was enrolled at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb in 1991. He started his war photographic cycle Rat-Art (War-Art) as a soldier on the frontline. He was working as a war photojournalist for *Dubrovački vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija*. His last cycle of twelve photographs taken during the air attacks on Dubrovnik on December 6, 1991, were given the title “The last shots” after his death.

<[www.pavourban.net](http://www.pavourban.net)>

**Vekić, Dejan:** Born 1971 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Vekić began studying graphic design at Sarajevo Academy of Fine Arts in 1990, while working part-time at a photographic studio. When the war began in Bosnia in 1992, he went back to the studio to collect his belongings and discovered that the space had been taken over by the State Commission for Getting Facts on War Crimes. The commission offered him a job documenting the destruction of Sarajevo. When the war ended in 1995, Vekić began teaching photography at the art school he once attended. He continues to live and work in Sarajevo.

<<http://www.dejanvekic.com>>

**Vitaljić, Sandra:** Born 1972 in Pula, Croatia. She received her master degree in Photography and her Ph.D. in History and Theory of Photography from the Academy of Performing Arts, Film and TV (FAMU) in Prague. She is employed as an associate professor at the Cinematography Department of the Academy of



Dramatic Art in Zagreb. She was awarded CEC ArtsLink residence at the Ansel Adams Center for Photography in San Francisco (1997). As a Fulbright fellow, she conducted her doctoral research at the Rochester Institute of Technology and at the George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, in Rochester, NY. Her photographs are featured in the permanent collections of the Modern Gallery in Zagreb, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, as well as in the Polaroid collection and Camera Austria. She published two books: "Infertile Grounds" and "War of Images – Contemporary war photography".

<<http://croatian-photography.com/en/author/sandra-vitaljic-2/>>

**Vukosav, Borko:** Born 1984, in Dubrovnik, Croatia. He graduated in Cinematography at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. He represented Croatia at NEU/NOW 2012, in Portugal, with his series of photographs "Persons/Possessions"; he represented Croatia at the 15th Biennale de la Méditerranée in Thessaloniki, in 2011. At the Rovinj PhotoDays 2012, with his series "Edge", he won the award for Landscape, while in 2011, at the same manifestation, he received the honorary "Best Author" award.

<<http://www.borkovukosav.com>>

**Živkovič, Antonio:** Born 1962 in Novo mesto, Slovenia. Since the 1980s active in the field of documentary and art photography. He was a member of the organizing committee of the "World Young Photography" festival, the international exchange of European schools of photography, and a member of the "Month of Photography" festival. He lives and works as a free-lance photographer in Slovenia.

<<http://photon.si/en/archiv/antonio-zivkovic-en/>>

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Center for Contemporary Photography Photon Ljubljana, Slovenia <<http://photogallery.at>>

Center for Cultural Decontamination Belgrade <<http://www.czkd.org>>

Duplex Gallery Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina <<http://www.duplex100m2.com>>

EAST ART MAP <<http://www.eastartmap.org>>

e-flux journal <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/>>

European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) <<http://eipcp.net/transversal>>

Contemporary Croatian Photography web portal, Croatia <<http://croatian-photography.com>>

Gallery SKUC Ljubljana, Slovenia <<http://www.galerijaskuc.si>>

Glossary of Common Knowledge <<http://glossary.mg-lj.si>>

Videoart by Marina Gržinić & Aina Šmid Ljubljana, Slovenia <<http://grzinic-smid.si>>

Kronotop.org <<http://www.kronotop.org>>

Collective New Media Center\_kuda.org <<http://www.kuda.org>>

Ljudmila Art and Science Laboratory Ljubljana, Slovenia <<http://wiki.ljudmila.org>>

Mangelos Award for Young Visual Artist <[www.mangelosnagrada.org.rs](http://www.mangelosnagrada.org.rs)>

Manifesta Journal <<http://www.manifestajournal.org>>

Memorial Gallery 11/07/95 Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina <<http://galerija110795.ba>>

Net.culture club MaMa Zagreb, Croatia <<http://mi2.hr/multimedijalni-institut/>>

Moderna galerija Ljubljana, Slovenia <<http://www.mg-lj.si>>

Monoskop wiki for collaborative studies of the arts <<https://monoskop.org>>

Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Serbia <[www.msub.org.rs](http://www.msub.org.rs)>

Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Rijeka, Croatia <<http://www.mmsu.hr>>

Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje, Macedonia <<http://www.msuskopje.org.mk>>

Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina, Serbia <<http://www.msuv.org>>

National Museum of Montenegro Cetinje <<http://www.mnmuseum.org>>

New Moment Magazine for Art & Advertising-Artvertising in the Balkans <<http://newmoment-magazine.com>>

ONCURATING.org Journal <<http://www.on-curating.org>>

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Remont – Independent Artists' Association Belgrade, Serbia <<http://www.remont.net>>

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Supervizuelna Magazine for Contemporary Art <<http://www.supervizuelna.com>>

Vreme weekly magazine Belgrade <<http://www.vreme.com>>

Zarez - Biweekly for culture and social events Zagreb, Croatia <<http://www.zarez.hr/arhiva>>

#### **STATEMENT**

I hereby declare that I have completed the submitted doctoral thesis independently, without any unauthorized outside help and only with the help referred to in the thesis. All texts that have been quoted verbatim or by analogy from published writings and all details based on verbal information have been identified as such. In the analyses that I have conducted and to which I refer in this thesis, I have followed the principles of good scientific practice, as stated in the Statute of Justus Liebig University Giessen for Ensuring Good Scientific Practice.

Giessen, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Branka Vujanović